INTRODUCTION TO MINDFULNESS

COMPILED BY DEAN AMORY

Cover: meditating Shiva – Rishikesh statue - by Mariellen Ward.

http://media.breathedreamgo.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/Shiva.jpg

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“Peace comes from within. Do not seek it without.”

(Buddha)

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Introduction

There has been an explosion of interest in mindfulness among psychotherapists and health care practitioners.

Training courses in mindfulness for people with either physical and mental health problems have been established throughout the world. These courses, generally involve 2-3 hour group meetings that occur weekly over an 8-week period. Participants learn to bring mindfulness meditation and basic Yoga exercises into their everyday lives and the impact of these practices on their health is carefully recorded.

Research findings have concluded, time and time again, that when some people practice mindfulness regularly, there are measurable positive changes in their lives.

- People who suffer chronic pain become able to deal with this without medication;
- People prone to repeated episodes of severe depression stop relapsing, without the aid of medication.
- People with high levels of stress and tension learn to bring down their anxiety levels and enjoy a much better quality of life.
- Studies in the States have also demonstrated the potential of Vispassna meditation and mindfulness-based programs in relapse prevention for people with addiction disorders (Marlatt et al., 2004).

(Source: The Mindfulness Program by TONY BATES and FAYE SCANLAN For Headstrong, the National Centre for Youth Mental Health).

Time to find out for myself, I thought. So, please join me on this exploration tour and experience with me!

What is Mindfulness?

Have you ever started eating a snack bar, taken a couple of bites, then noticed all you had left was an empty packet in your hand? Or been driving somewhere and arrived at your destination only to realize you remember nothing about your journey? Most people have! These are common examples of "mindlessness," or "going on automatic pilot." In our modern, busy lives, we constantly multi task. Its easy to lose awareness of the present moment as when we become lost in our efforts to juggle work, home, finances, and other conflicting demands.

As humans we are often "not present" in our own lives. We often fail to notice the good things about our lives, fail to hear what our bodies are telling us, or poison ourselves with toxic self critics.

Human minds are easily distracted, habitually examining past events and trying to anticipate the future. Becoming more aware of our thoughts, feelings and sensations may not sound like an obviously helpful thing to do, however learning to do this in a way that suspends judgment and self-criticism can have an incredibly positive impact on our lives.

Mindfulness means being attentive to whatever you are doing when you are doing it. By settling your attention on whatever is happening in the present moment, you gradually calm your mind, and relax your body.

With your awareness grounded in the present moment, you are less vulnerable to being drawn into negative rumination about the past or the future.

You begin to see what is actually happening in the here and now.

Positive elements in your life are experienced with greater appreciation; and in the stillness that develops through mindfulness practice, creative solutions can emerge to guide you in responding to challenging dilemmas. (DEORA)

Mindfulness is a way of paying attention to, and seeing clearly whatever is happening in our lives. It will not eliminate life's pressures, but it can help us respond to them in a calmer manner that benefits our heart, head, and body. It helps us recognize and step away from habitual, often unconscious emotional and physiological reactions to everyday events. It provides us with a scientifically researched approach to cultivating clarity, insight, and understanding. Practicing mindfulness allows us to be fully present in our life and work, and improve our quality of life.

An important aspect of mindfulness is "remembering." This does not refer to memory of past events. Rather, it means remembering to be aware and pay attention, highlighting the importance of intention in mindfulness practice. Each moment we remind ourselves: "Remember—be aware!"

But "mindfulness" means more than being passively aware, or being aware for awareness' sake. The Buddhist scholar, John Dunne (2007) has pointed out that awareness, attention, and remembering (sati) are present when a sniper, with malice in his heart, takes aim at an innocent victim. Obviously this is not what we're trying to cultivate as psychotherapists, nor is it the goal of Buddhist psychology. Rather, the purpose of mindfulness in its ancient context is to eliminate needless suffering by cultivating insight into the workings of the mind and the nature of the material world. The mindfulness practitioner is actively working with states of mind in order to abide peacefully in the midst of whatever happens.

'Mindfulness' is a hot topic in Western psychology: increasingly recognized as an effective way to reduce stress, increase self-

awareness, enhance emotional intelligence, and effectively handle painful thoughts and feelings.

Although mindfulness has only recently been embraced by Western psychology, mindfulness is not new. It's part of what makes us human — the capacity to be fully conscious and aware. Unfortunately, we are usually only in this state for brief periods of time, and are soon reabsorbed into familiar daydreams and personal narratives. The capacity for sustained moment-to-moment awareness, especially in the midst of emotional turmoil, is a special skill. Fortunately, it is a skill that can be learned.

Mindfulness is an elusive, yet central, aspect of the 2500 year-old tradition of Buddhist psychology. We can talk about mindfulness or write at length about it, but to truly understand mindfulness we have to experience it directly. This is because mindfulness points to something intuitive and pre-conceptual. With committed practice, every person can gradually figure out how to become more and more mindful in life, even in the face of significant suffering. Cultivating mindfulness is, and has always been, a deeply personal journey of discovery.it is an ancient practice found in a wide range of Eastern philosophies, including Buddhism, Taoism and Yoga. Mindfulness involves consciously bringing awareness to your here-and-now experience with openness, interest, and receptiveness. Jon Kabat-Zinn, a world authority on the use of mindfulness training in the management of clinical problems, defines it as: "Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally."

Mindfulness is about waking up, connecting with ourselves, and appreciating the fullness of each moment of life. Kabat-Zinn calls it, "The art of conscious living." It is a profound way to enhance psychological and emotional resilience, and increase life satisfaction.

This return to the present moment requires practice. It is achieved principally by using the breath as a focus, following the in-breath for the full duration of your in-breath, and the out-breath for the full duration of the out-breath. Yoga, body scan and mindful walking are also ways to bring our attention to the present moment. All of these methods work best when undertaken with an attitude of kindness towards oneself, and with a non-judgmental acceptance of whatever one is feeling or not feeling in any given moment.

Mindfulness is the act of deliberately paying attention in a particular way. This particular way involves bringing the attention back to the present moment and being non judgmental.

So we become aware of the full range of experience including sensory impressions, thoughts, imagery emotions, urges and impulses. We even can become aware of the quality of mindfulness itself.

Because we do not judge the content or the processes of our mind we become freer to observe without identifying with the contents of our thoughts. It is as if we are watching the stream of consciousness rather than swimming in it and being buffeted by its eddies and currents.

The ABC of Mindfulness

A is for awareness – Becoming more aware of what you are thinking and doing – what's going on in your mind and body.

B is for "just Being" with your experience. Avoiding the tendency to respond on auto-pilot and feed problems by creating your own story.

C is for seeing things and responding more wisely. By creating a gap between the experience and our reaction to, we can make wiser choices.

Definitions of Mindfulness

"Bringing one's complete attention to the present experience on a moment-to-moment basis." (Marlatt & Kristeller)

"Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally" (Kabat-Zinn).

"Consciously bringing awareness to your here-and-now experience, with openness, interest and receptiveness." (The Happiness Trap)

The benefits of Mindfulness include

Helping individuals to:

- Recognize, slow down or stop automatic and habitual reactions.
- Respond more effectively to complex or difficult situations.
- See situations more clearly
- Become more creative
- Achieve balance and resilience at work and at home
- be fully present, here and now
- experience unpleasant thoughts and feelings safely
- become aware of what you're avoiding

- become more connected to yourself, to others and to the world around you
- increase self-awareness
- become less disturbed by and less reactive to unpleasant experiences
- learn the distinction between you and your thoughts
- have more direct contact with the world, rather than living through your thoughts
- learn that everything changes; that thoughts and feelings come and go like the weather
- have more balance, less emotional volatility
- experience more calm and peacefulness
- develop self-acceptance
- improve focus and concentration
- increase self-awareness
- reduce the impact and influence of stressful thoughts and feelings
- facilitate better relationships
- catch self-defeating behaviors, and substitute more effective ones
- become aware of self-defeating thought processes, and 'let them go'

All of this boils down to 3 major benefits: improved performance, reduced stress, and greater satisfaction in work and life.

How Mindfulness affects mind and body

Results of regular meditation:

- increases activity in a number of brain regions, including those parts involved in learning and memory processes, emotion regulation and perspective taking;
- improves psychological functions of attention, compassion and empathy;
- activates the parasympathetic nervous system, calming the autonomic nervous system and decreasing cortical;
- boosts the immune system;
- improves medical conditions including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, asthma, premenstrual syndrome and chronic pain; and
- improves psychological conditions such as anxiety, insomnia, phobias and eating disorders.

Mindfulness Practice

While it can be disturbing to notice how frequently we are mindless, and how much of our lives we wish away, there is also good news: mindfulness can be cultivated. Just as we can improve physical fitness through regular physical exercise, we can develop mindfulness through deliberate mental practices.

Mindfulness practices all involve some form of meditation. Especially in the West, misconceptions about meditation practice abound. It may therefore be helpful to examine some of the most common misunderstandings.

Not Having a Blank Mind:

While some concentration practices are designed to empty the mind of thought, this is not an aim of mindfulness practice. Nor do we wish to become stupid, or lose our analytical abilities. Instead, mindfulness practice involves training the mind to be aware of what it is doing at all times, including being aware that we are thinking when we think.

Not Becoming Emotionless:

Many people secretly hope that mindfulness practice will relieve them of the burden of emotion. Especially when in distress, the fantasy of becoming emotionless can be quite appealing. In reality, mindfulness practice often has quite the opposite effect. Because we practice noticing the contents of the mind, we come to notice our emotions more fully and vividly. Our ability to recognize how we feel increases as we relinquish normal defences, such as distracting ourselves from discomfort with entertainment or eating.

Not Withdrawing from Life:

Because most meditation practices were originally refined by monks, nuns, and hermits, people often assume that they involve withdrawing from living a full, interpersonally rich life. While there are certainly benefits to be derived from practicing mindfulness in a

simplified environment, even in these settings one isn't exactly withdrawing. Instead, the vicissitudes of life are experienced more vividly, because we're taking the time to pay attention to our moment-to-moment experience.

Not Seeking Bliss:

The image of the spiritual master blissfully smiling while the rest of us struggle with existential reality is very appealing. Early in their meditation careers, many people become distressed when they find that their minds wander and they feel agitated or unsettled. While exceptionally pleasant states of mind do occur, in mindfulness meditation we allow them to arise and pass—not clinging to blissful states nor rejecting unpleasant ones.

Not Escaping Pain:

Rather than escaping pain, mindfulness practice helps us to increase our capacity to bear it. We deliberately abstain from automatic actions designed to make ourselves feel better. For example, if we are meditating and an itch arises, a typical instruction is to observe the itch and notice any impulses that arise (such as the urge to scratch)—but to not act on the urge. As a result, we actually experience pain and discomfort more vividly. This extends beyond itches and physical pain to include the full spectrum of emotional discomfort as well. As we explore and accept these unpleasant experiences, our capacity to bear them increases. We also discover that painful sensations are distinct from the suffering that accompanies them. We see that suffering arises when we react to pain with resistance, protest, or avoidance rather than moment-to-moment acceptance.

Forms of Practice

There are many ways to cultivate awareness of current experience with acceptance. Not surprisingly, all of them involve repeated practice. If we want to improve our cardiovascular fitness, we might begin by integrating physical exercise into our everyday routine—taking the stairs instead of the elevator, or riding a bicycle instead of driving to work. If we want to become even more physically fit, we might set aside time to exercise formally, perhaps at a gym or health club. To really accelerate the process, we might go on a fitness-oriented vacation, in which much of the day is spent in vigorous exercise. Similar options are available for cultivating mindfulness.

Everyday Mindfulness:

This involves reminding ourselves throughout the day to pay attention to what is happening in the moment without radically altering our routines. It means noticing the sensations of walking when we walk, the taste of our food when we eat, and the appearance of our surroundings as we pass through them. The Vietnamese Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hahn suggests a number of techniques to enhance everyday mindfulness. For example, when the telephone rings, try just listening at first, attending to the tone and rhythm of the sound as one might listen to a musical instrument. Or while driving, when the red tail lights of another vehicle appear, try appreciating their colour and texture as one might in looking at a beautiful sunset.

Formal Meditation Practice:

This involves setting aside time to go to the mental "gym." We regularly dedicate a certain period to sit quietly in meditation. There are many types of meditation that can cultivate mindfulness. Most involve initially choosing an object of attention, such as the breath, and returning our attention to that object each time the mind

wanders. This develops a degree of calmness which, in turn, enables us to better focus the mind on the chosen object. Once some concentration is established, mindfulness meditation entails directing the mind to whatever begins to predominate in the mind—usually centring on how the event is experienced in the body. These objects of attention can be physical sensations such as an itch, ache, or sound; or emotional experiences as they manifest in the body, such as the tightness in the chest associated with anger, or the lump in the throat that comes with sadness. Regardless of the chosen object of attention, we practice being aware of our present experience with acceptance.

Retreat Practice:

This is the "vacation" that is dedicated entirely to cultivating mindfulness. There are many styles of meditation retreats. Most involve extended periods of formal practice, often alternating sitting meditation with walking meditation. They are usually conducted in silence, with very little interpersonal interaction, except for occasional interviews with teachers. All of the activities of the day—getting up, showering, brushing teeth, eating, doing chores—are done in silence, and used as opportunities to practice mindfulness. As one observer put it, the first few days of a retreat are "a little like being trapped in a phone booth with a lunatic." We discover how difficult it is to be fully present. The mind is often alarmingly active and restless, spinning stories about how well we're doing and how we compare to others. Memories of undigested emotional events enter, along with elaborate fantasies about the future. We get to vividly see how our minds create suffering in an environment where all of our needs are tended to. Many people find that the insights that occur—during even a single week-long intensive meditation retreat—are life transforming.

The effects of mindfulness practice seem to be dose-related. If one does a little bit of everyday practice, a little bit of mindfulness is cultivated. If one does more everyday practice, and adds to this regular formal practice and retreat practice, the effects are more

dramatic. While this has long been evident to meditators, it is beginning to be documented through scientific research (Lazar et al, 2005).

Meditation Practice:

When someone says, "I do mindfulness meditation," what is he or she actually doing? There are three key meditation skills often subsumed under the heading of "mindfulness meditation:"

Concentration Meditation: This technique has a focal object, such as the breath or a mantra. The instruction is, "When you notice that your mind has wandered, gently bring it back to [the object]." Concentration meditation produces a feeling of calmness. The Pali word most associated with concentration practice is samatha, while the traditional word for meditation is bhavana, which means "developing." "Concentration meditation" is a translation of samatha bhavana, the cultivation of concentration. The "relaxation response" (Benson & Klipper, 2000) is well-known example of this meditation approach.

Mindfulness Meditation: The instruction for mindfulness meditation is, "Notice whatever predominates in awareness, moment to moment." Here the intention is not to choose a single object of focus, but rather to explore changing experience. The skill of mindfulness cultivates insight into the nature of one's personal conditioning (e.g., "fear of disapproval," "anger at authority") and the nature of mental reality ("it's changing," "it's often unsatisfactory," "the 'self' is fluid").

This is primarily what distinguishes "mindfulness meditation" from other forms of meditation, such as concentration meditation and various forms of visualization meditation, and it is a unique contribution of Buddhist psychology. The Pali words for mindfulness meditation are vipassana bhavana, which translates well as the cultivation of insight or "insight meditation." Western researchers and clinicians usually use the expression "mindfulness meditation" to refer to this practice.

Making matters a bit more complicated, sati is actually cultivated by, and necessary for, both concentration and mindfulness meditation techniques. That is, we need to know where the mind is to concentrate on either a single object or many arising objects. Since the mind is actively engaged with a wider range of experiences during mindfulness meditation, it can be said that sati is more deliberately developed in this particular practice.

During mindfulness or insight meditation, the meditator can always return to concentration practice to stabilize attention if he or she becomes lost in daydreams and discursive thinking. In this regard, concentration practice (samatha) facilitates mindfulness or insight (vipassana) practice.

Lovingkindness Meditation: Lovingkindness is the emotional quality associated with mindfulness. Translated from the Pali word, metta, lovingkindness meditation can be a form of concentration meditation. The practitioner returns attention again and again to phrases such as "May I and all beings be safe, happy, healthy, and live with ease." This technique allows the person to soften into and allow arising experience to be just as it is. It is cultivating the intention to be loving and kind, rather than superimposing warm feelings on our moment-to-moment experience. The emotional flavor of affectionate awareness typically follows our kindly intentions. Lovingkindness (feeling safe, peaceful, healthy, and free from suffering) keeps the function of mindfulness practice clear in the mind of the practitioner. It is a quality of mind that ideally pervades the other meditation practices. Therefore, while practicing concentration meditation, we work to receive mental distractions with openheartedness rather than sternness; when practicing mindfulness or insight meditation, we greet all mental contents like welcome visitors.

When our sati (mindfulness) is strong, we can choose to switch fluidly among metta (lovingkindness), samatha (concentration), or vipassana (mindfulness or insight) practices, as needed, even in a single sitting of meditation. For example, if dealing with psychological trauma, we can notice when we are overwhelmed and can choose to redirect

attention to the breath or external sights and sounds (samatha). We can also add some lovingkindness (metta) to our experience to re-establish a measure of calmness. When we feel more stable, we can open up the field of awareness again to observe how the trauma memories are experienced in the mind and body (vipassana). In other words, the three skills—concentration, mindfulness, and lovingkindness—can be selectively emphasized in meditation and daily life to reduce suffering and increase happiness.

Common Usage: To make matters even more confusing, the general public in Western culture uses the term "mindfulness" loosely to refer to every variety of formal and informal secular Buddhist practice. Under this label, we not only have the different meditation skills just mentioned—lovingkindness, concentration, and mindfulness or insight—but also visualization techniques and innumerable, informal meditation strategies to deal with everyday life. Visualization meditations include practices that cultivate equanimity, such as imagining oneself as a solid mountain unaffected by the wind and weather, or as a deep pond unperturbed by the waves.

As mindfulness is incorporated into diverse fields such as health care, education, and business, the term will probably continue to accrue an increasing array of meanings. Within clinical psychology, "mindfulness" is already used interchangeably with "acceptance" to describe the third wave of behavioral treatments. In the field of education, Ellen Langer (1989) describes "mindfulness" as a cognitive process that implies openness, curiosity, and awareness of more than one perspective. In the business world, Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee (2005) encourage "mindfulness practice" to "observe emotional reality" (p.124) in an organization and "avoid narrow focus and constant multitasking" (p.131).

Helping keep people resilient

Numerous studies also suggest that mindfulness makes a big difference to our resilience levels.

Daily mindfulness practice

Pick an activity that you do most days or every day, such as eating breakfast or travelling to work. Choose something you have to do anyway, but set the intention to be mindful when doing this activity.

Bringing your attention to the present moment - not dwelling in the past or planning for the future. Instead, being open to and curious about what emerges. Really explore what you find. Remember to be compassionate towards yourself and others.

Your mind will wander off - that's fine, that's what minds do. When that happens, gently bring your thoughts back to whatever it is you're doing and congratulate yourself for noticing your mind has wandered.

You may find you come to relish this time, seeing it as pressing the pause button. You may find you notice more about whatever it is you're engaged in. Or you may find you encounter "unpleasant" feelings such as boredom or sadness.

Whatever comes up, just notice it, explore it, turn towards it and gently let go, without judgment, but with curiosity and compassion.

Practising mindfulness helps us develop the "attentional control" that is important in resilience and high performance, according to research by David Marchant, a senior lecturer in sport and exercise psychology at Edge Hill University in Scotland.

According to Marchant, although attentional control is well understood and well researched in sports, it is only recently that it has been applied in the working world.

Another study by Kabat-Zinn found that people who had completed an eight-week MBSR program scored highly on a number of resilient traits. Participants felt happier, more energised and less stressed. They felt their lives were more meaningful, that they had more control over their lives and were more likely to see challenges as opportunities rather than threats.

One of the reasons mindfulness helps people become more resilient, less stressed and more creative is because it brings us into "approach mode".

When we believe we are under threat, we switch to "avoidance mode" - think running away from a sabre-toothed tiger. But we can often remain stuck there even though we are no longer under a real threat, such as when we have the sensation that an avalanche of emails is as dangerous as the sabre-toothed tiger.

Mindfulness helps people cope with change and uncertainty, avoid rigid or scattered thinking and become more comfortable with not knowing. It improves a person's ability to respond rather than react and to think more clearly and strategically.

Moving into "approach state" improves confidence and the ability to trust our own decisions, as well as noticing more data.

And those who meditate are more able to make rational rather than emotionally charged decisions, according to research by Kirk et al.

Research by the Institute of Mindful Leadership found that for 93% of leaders surveyed, mindfulness training helped them create space for innovation. Some 89% said it enhanced their ability to listen to

themselves and others, and nearly 70% said it helped them think strategically.

Mindfulness helps us make decisions more quickly as well as more rationally, through helping us to let go of our evaluations, according to research by Langer, who also underlines how mindfulness helps us be more creative.

Meditation promotes divergent creative-style thinking, studies such as the one by Colzato et al suggest. It also improves insight into problem solving, according to research by Ostafin and Kassman. Mindfulness helps us to be less self-critical and more curious, to notice new things and give up preconceived mindsets, thus adding fuel to the creativity tank.

It helps employees act more ethically and enhances their emotional intelligence - in particular, self-awareness, self-management and social awareness. It does this through elements including: "checking in" to our emotions, thoughts and bodily sensations on a regular basis; practising attentional control; improving the ability to step back and think and act more rationally; and by enhancing compassion.

One study by business school INSEAD showed that being exposed to mindfulness training and coaching encourages managers and leaders to behave in a more socially responsible way.

Mindfulness is at the heart of a number of popular leadership models, including Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee's resonant leadership, James Scouller's three levels of leadership, Otto Scharmer's theory U and Lee and Roberts' authentic leadership model.

Since the late 1970's there have been more than 1000 publications documenting medical and psychological research on mindfulness which demonstrate its validity and breadth of application.

There are currently two well respected formal approaches to Mindfulness: MBSR & MBCT. MBSR & MBCT are taught using a standard curriculum, and all teachers follow a formalized development route. Other approaches to mindfulness can be equally effective and valid, but are less likely to be well regulated.

What does mindfulness involve?

According to Jon Kabat-Zinn , "mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and non judgmentally."

Mindfulness practitioners learn how to pay attention on purpose by practicing specially developed mindfulness meditation practices & mindful movements. With practice, practitioners learn to slow down or stop brain chatter and automatic or habitual reactions, experiencing the present moment as it really is.

Through mindfulness, we develop "street smarts" to manage the mind (Bhikkhu, 2007). It helps us to recognize when we also need to cultivate other mental qualities—such as alertness, concentration, loving kindness, and effort—to skillfully alleviate suffering. For example, if in meditation we are being self-critical, we may want to add a dose of compassion; if we are feeling lazy, we might want to try to raise the level of energy in the mind or body. Mindfulness alone is not sufficient to attain happiness, but it provides a solid foundation for the other necessary factors (Rapgay & Brystrisky, 2007). In the classical literature, mindfulness was usually discussed in terms of its function, not as a goal in itself. Mindfulness is ultimately part of a project designed to uproot entrenched habits of mind that cause unhappiness, such as the afflictive emotions of anger, envy, or greed, or behaviors that harm ourselves and others.

When practising mindfulness, everyone, however much they practise, will experience thoughts creeping in to their heads uninvited. This is

fine - its just what brains do, but how we respond to these thoughts is important.

If we start to think about the thought, or get annoyed with ourselves for not being able to retain our focus, it stops us paying attention and takes us away from the present moment. If we just acknowledge the thought and let it go without judgment, we retain our focus on being in the present moment.

As with all new skills, the more we practise it, the easier it becomes. Canadian psychologist, Donald Hebb coined the phrase "neurons that fire together, wire together". In other words, the more we practise mindfulness, the more we develop neuro-pathways in the brain associated with being mindful, which make it easier to be fully in the present moment.

By learning to experience the present moment as it really is, we develop the ability to step away from habitual, often unconscious emotional and physiological reactions to everyday events, see things as they really are and respond to them wisely rather than on auto pilot.

Who is mindfulness for?

Mindfulness is for everyone from all walks of life, young or old. Mindfulness is not a religion and there is no necessary religious component to mindfulness - anyone, with any belief system, can enjoy the benefits of mindfulness.

Although Mindfulness may have had its origins in the east, the benefits of mindfulness and meditation are now relatively mainstream and the scientific community has found data positively correlating mindfulness and meditation to stress reduction

In the last 30 years, the most widely recognized Mindfulness practices, MBSR & MBCT have been developed and researched in

the West. Recent neuroscience & clinical research has helped explain why mindfulness meditation practices work, which has accelerated its use within traditional medical circles as a powerful healing tool even further.

What are the origins of mindfulness?

Mindfulness has its origins in ancient meditation practices.

The cultivation of mindfulness in a rigorous way comes from a tradition with ancient roots and lofty goals. These origins are important to understand so that modern clinicians don't inadvertently miss its profound potential for psychological transformation.

As far back as four thousand years ago, we find images of yogis in ancient India sitting cross-legged in meditation, gazing inward with eyes half closed. Training the mind was understood as the principle means of achieving mental and physical health, emotional equanimity, and perfecting the human condition.

Mindfulness, as we are coming to know it in the West, was most clearly described in ancient times in the teachings of the historical Buddha. According to tradition, he was born a prince some 2500 years ago. At the age of 29, he renounced a life of comfort and privilege to undertake rigorous mental and physical disciplines for seven years. Finally, at age 36, he experienced a breakthrough of understanding that profoundly re-ordered his mind. He wandered from place to place for the next 40 years exhibiting behaviors devoid of the usual human propensities toward attachment, aversion or delusion. The psychological teachings he left behind — including how to cultivate mindfulness — are still accessible to us today.

For the Buddha, the mind and body are seen as the product of material causes, lacking the divine essence that was assumed by the Indo-European religions of his time. Nonetheless, in the Buddha's view, the body and mind can be the vehicle for a profound

experience of transcendence. Rather than breaking through to something divine, however, this experience results from a radical transformation of the mind. Consciousness itself, though conditioned, can be purified to such an extent that it entirely understands itself and its conditioning. The result is not only a deep sense of personal well-being, but also the possibility of a more evolved way of being human.

...in the Buddha's view, the body and mind can be the vehicle for a profound experience of transcendence.

The primary interest of this tradition is the quality of consciousness in the present moment. How exactly is the mind and body manifesting here and now? Consciousness arises from a whole network of interdependent factors, including all of the details of our genetic makeup and personal history. Each moment of consciousness, in turn, has an impact upon our subsequent beliefs, feelings, and behaviors. Knowing both the causes and the effects of a moment of consciousness allows us to participate intentionally in the process of living; to steer a course away from suffering and toward healthier states.

What the Buddha saw with great lucidity on the night of his awakening was the workings of his own mind. His insights have profound implications for modern psychotherapy, as they reveal how our minds construct our experience moment by moment, and how these constructions can lead to suffering.

The following description is not for the faint-hearted—it is a radically new psychology for many readers, and somewhat complicated, so we encourage you to consider it slowly.

How We Construct Our Experience

The Buddha saw that all experience involves a process in which the raw data streaming into the mind through the sensory organs or "sense doors" is compiled and synthesized into a virtual world of meaning. There are six sense doors in all: the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, with the mind itself viewed as the sixth. There are also five primary categories, or systems, whereby the information flowing through these sense doors is processed.

The first category is material form, which acknowledges that the mind and body have a material, biological foundation. The next is consciousness, or the act of becoming aware of an object by means of one of the six sense organs (again with the mind as the sixth organ). At this stage the eye sees, the ear hears, the tongue tastes, etc.

The third and fourth systems, which shape how consciousness manifests, are perception and feeling. Perception identifies what is experienced through a series of associations, interpreting incoming data in the light of historically learned patterns of recognition. For example, you can recognize just two dots and a curved line to be a face?, or identify the object in your hands to be a book. "Feeling" provides an affect tone for each moment of cognition, either pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. This is a hedonic assessment of each object's value to the organism. In every moment, we either like, dislike, or aren't interested in what we perceive.

The fifth and final component of the construction of experience is called formations and reflects the intentional stance we take toward all objects that we perceive and toward which we have feelings. Volition or intention is the executive function of the mind which initiates conscious or unconscious choices. Whereas the first four systems yield a sense of what is happening at any given moment, the fifth decides what we are going to do about it.

How do these processes unfold together?

Imagine that you're hungry, and you open the refrigerator door. The eye sees patterns of light, dark, and color in the visual field, which are quickly organized by the brain and perceived as a freshly made sandwich. Instantaneously a positive feeling toward the sandwich arises, and an intention forms to pick it up and eat it. This is soon followed by the behavior of actually taking a bite. Consciousness creates and responds to our reality so quickly that the process is usually unconscious.

Intentions and the behaviors that follow from them tend to become habitual and turn into dispositions. Dispositions are the residue of previous decisions, stored in memory as habits, learned behaviors, personality traits, etc., and provide historical precedents for how to respond to each newly arising moment. Feedback loops develop, whereby one's present response to any situation is both shaped by previous experience and goes on to mold the dispositions that will influence future responses. If we enjoyed this and other sandwiches in the past, we may develop the habit of reflexively picking up and eating sandwiches, even when we're not really hungry.

Putting this all together, the six sense doors and five systems interact simultaneously to form a dynamic interdependently arising process of mind and body, constructing meaning from an ever-changing barrage of environmental information. In each moment, which can be measured in milliseconds, all this arises concurrently, organizes around a particular bit of data, and then passes away.

One unique feature of Buddhist psychology is that consciousness is regarded as an unfolding process, or an occurring event, rather than as an existing entity. Nothing permanent abides (and there is no enduring "me" to be found) because every "thing" is a series of interrelated events. The everyday sense that we (and other beings) have separate existence comes from the fact that each moment of cognition is followed by another moment of cognition, yielding the

subjective sense of a stream of consciousness. We have simply learned to connect the snapshots together into a coherent narrative. This is like the illusion of continuous action that our minds create out of separate frames in a movie. Among the great insights of the Buddhist tradition is not only that this is all happening below the threshold of ordinary awareness, but also that this process can unfold in either healthy and unhealthy ways, depending on the skills of its handler.

This analysis of human experience has important and radical clinical implications. It suggests that our reality, including the sense of "self" around which so much personal psychology is centered, is based on a fundamental misunderstanding. It is as though we believed that a powerful automobile like a Ferrari was a living being—until we saw it disassembled on the floor of a workshop. When we know the component parts and how they're put together, we can never look at a Ferrari in quite the same way. Similarly, seeing the way the "self" is constructed can help both us and our patients loosen our identification with the changing kaleidoscope of thoughts and feelings that arise in the mind, allowing us to live more flexible, adaptive, happier, productive lives.

A Physician of the Mind

The Buddha sometimes refers to himself as a physician, and to his teaching as a kind of medicine. The illness he is treating is the fact that consciousness is continually influenced by patterns of conditioning that inevitably result in unhappiness, frustration, and disappointment. This is certainly an observation familiar to the modern psychotherapist. Rather than changing brain chemistry by pharmaceuticals or probing past traumas arresting normal development, however, the Buddha's approach is to help the patient gain direct insight into the nature of experience.

This takes many forms.

One track is to notice the extent to which the patterns of conditioning we acquire, through learned behaviors, conditioned responses, or cultural osmosis, are for the most part built upon certain illusions or even delusions. Foremost of these are our remarkably robust habit of taking what is impermanent and subject to change to be stable or reliable; believing that the satisfaction or gratification of desires is sustainable for longer than a few moments when, because of the former point, it is not; and projecting again and again onto the field of experience the notion of a person or agent that owns, controls, or consists of what is happening. In other words, we continuously delude ourselves into believing that we can hold onto what we want and get rid of what we don't want, despite considerable evidence to the contrary. And on top of this, we delude ourselves into believing that a stable, independent "I" or "me" is running this show. To the extent these misperceptions can be gradually uncovered and corrected, considerable healing can occur.

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For example, there is the story of a monk who complained to his Zen teacher that he was an angry person. The teacher said, "Show me." Since the student was not angry at the moment, he could not show it, whereupon the teacher said, "See, you are not an angry person because you are not angry all the time." Such insight into the fluidity of experience and insubstantiality of identity can be enormously helpful to patients who have core beliefs about being unworthy, unlovable, unintelligent, and so forth.

Another approach is to recognize the fact that behavior is driven by desire, both conscious and unconscious, and to use that knowledge to diminish and eventually eliminate the role of desire in the moment-to-moment functioning of mind and body. The impulse to like some things and dislike others leads to pulling some objects of experience closer and pushing others farther away from a sense of self that sets itself apart from what is actually happening. Ironically, say the Buddhists, the very strategies we employ to overcome the perceived shortcomings of the world as we find it—embracing what offers pleasure and rejecting what brings pain—have the result of causing and perpetuating greater suffering. The solution is to practice letting go of desire itself, which can be replaced by an attitude of equanimity or acceptance. In clinical practice, we see countless examples that "what we resist persists," and how patients suffer terribly from wishing that things would be other than they are, i.e., from not facing "reality."

The underlying tendencies of both delusion and desire are deeply embedded in human nature, but can be successfully diminished and even eliminated. The word "Buddha" actually means "awake," and the historical Buddha was a man who undertook a program of transformation that resulted in his "awakening" from the misconceptions of delusion and the addictions of desire.

Source:

Mindfulness: What Is It? Where Did It Come From?
Ronald D. Siegel PsyD, Christopher K. Germer PhD, Andrew Olendzki, PhD
From Didonna, F. (Ed.) (2008). - Clinical Handbook of Mindfulness. New York: Springer.
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Mindfulness and therapy

Throughout history, human beings have sought to discover the causes of suffering and the means to alleviate it. Sooner or later, we all ask the same questions: "Why am I not feeling better?" "What can I do about it?" Inhabiting a physical body inevitably exposes us to pain associated with sickness, old age, and death. We also struggle emotionally when confronted with adverse circumstances, or with benign circumstances that we see as adverse. Even when our lives are relatively easy, we suffer when we don't get what we want, when we lose what we once had, and when we have to deal with what we do not want. From birth until death, we are relentlessly trying to feel better.

Therapies in recent years have emphasised change and self-control. While these approaches have their place, they fall short in helping us to deal with cognitive and emotional distress that recurs over and over, despite our best efforts. Often, the most effective method of dealing with our negative moods is to gently acknowledge what's happening and let them be, without being pulled into doing battle with ourselves. Mindfulness teaches us how to let ourselves 'be' by surrendering the need to change how we are. (DEORA)

Mindfulness is a deceptively simple way of relating to all experience that can reduce suffering and set the stage for positive personal transformation. It is a core psychological process that can alter how we respond to the unavoidable difficulties in life—not only to everyday existential challenges, but also to severe psychological problems such as suicidal ideation (Linehan, 1993), chronic depression (Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2002), and psychotic delusions (Bach and Hayes, 2002).

Mindfulness training has emerged as a powerful, evidence-based tool for enhancing psychological health. It has been clinically proven in a wide range of clinical disorders, including chronic pain, anxiety

disorders, depression, PTSD, OCD, substance abuse, and borderline personality disorder.

Mindfulness approaches work best with people who are not caught up in a severe crisis.

Practical Applications of Psychotherapy

Psychotherapists are incorporating mindfulness into their work in many ways. We might imagine these on a continuum, from implicit to explicit applications—from those hidden from view to those that are obvious to the patient.

On the most implicit end is the practicing therapist. As just mentioned, when a therapist begins personally practicing mindfulness, his or her capacity for emotional attunement seems to increase. Regardless of theoretical orientation,

models of psychopathology, or modes of intervention, the therapist seems to be able to more carefully attend to and empathize with a patient's experience. The therapist's need to "fix" problems diminishes as he or she cultivates the capacity to be with another's pain. Therapists feel closer to their patients, developing compassion both by becoming aware of the universality of suffering, and by seeing more clearly their interconnection with others. Research in this area is just beginning (Grepmair, Mitterlehner, Loew, & Nickel, 2006; Grepmair, Mitterlehner, Loew, & Nickel, 2007)

Next along the continuum is the practice of mindfulness-informed psychotherapy (Germer, Siegel, & Fulton, 2005). This is treatment informed by the insights that derive from Buddhist psychology and mindfulness practice. The therapist's understanding of psychopathology and the causes of human suffering change as a result of observing his or her own mind in meditation practice. Insights such as understanding the arbitrary and conditioned nature of thought, seeing the counterproductive effects of trying to avoid

difficult experience, and noticing the painful consequences of trying to buttress our sense of separate self, all have an impact on how we approach our patients' problems.

Finally, the most explicit application of mindfulness to psychotherapy is mindfulness-based psychotherapy (Germer, Siegel, & Fulton, 2005). Mindfulness-based therapists actually teach mindfulness practices to patients to help them work with their psychological difficulties. A host of mindfulness-based interventions are currently being developed for a wide range of clinical problems. Sometimes the patient is taught a traditional meditation practice, and other times that practice is customized for the patient's particular diagnosis, personality style, or life circumstances.

Mindfulness and coaching

Mindfulness is a hot topic in coaching. Experts increasingly recognize that developing mindfulness skills is an effective way to improve performance, reduce stress, enhance emotional intelligence, increase life satisfaction, and develop leadership skills. These experts include such luminaries as Daniel Goleman, author of Emotional Intelligence, and Richard Boyatzis, author of Resonant Leadership.

The ACT model, with its emphasis on mindfulness, values and action, is ideally suited for executive coaching, life coaching, and sports coaching. Values provide inspiration, motivation, and direction. Mindfulness skills provide many benefits, including the ability to reduce stress, rise above self-limiting beliefs, improve focus, develop self-awareness, facilitate calmness, and handle difficult emotions such as frustration, resentment, boredom and anxiety. ACT interventions can be incorporated into other coaching models, or ACT can be used as its own self-contained model.

The Benefits of Mindfulness for Coaches

- Facilitates empathy, compassion, and unconditional positive regard.
- Allows you to stay focused and present, even when your client is not.
- Helps you stay grounded, centered and composed, even in the midst of clients' emotional turmoil
- Enables a healthy attitude to therapeutic outcomes: neither complacent nor overly-attached.
- Helps you maintain direction and focus for therapy.
- Increases your skills at observing your clients' responses.

Differences between Awareness, Consciousness and Mindfulness

Source: Ajahn Brahmali - http://community.dhammaloka.org.au/

Question from Eamonn McGrath:

I have been trying to find a clear definition of Awareness, Consciousness and Mindfulness and what are their fundamental differences?

Answer

1. Consiousness

Consciousness is that which allows you to be conscious of anything. Every waking moment of life (and in fact every moment of sleep as well) includes consciousness. Without consciousness there's not even nothing - just complete emptiness.

Observation by Suzanne Harrill at innerworkspublishing.com:

Consciousness is a very expansive thing to describe. One way to understand consciousness is that it is the Universal Intelligence (God, Universe) in which we all live and move and have our being. It is the Source of our existence, our creativity, imagination, intuition, inner knowing, and unconditional love; and it is what responds to our thoughts, feelings, and prayers. To expand our individual consciousness makes us more and more consciously aware.

One way to build conscious awareness is to learn to look below the surface of our experiences. I'll use an iceberg to illustrate consciousness. What is known and conscious to us relates to the part of the iceberg above the water. The larger part of the iceberg, however, is below the surface and unconscious to us. To improve the

quality of our lives to become self-aware, it is important to go below the surface to look at our ego-personalities – the issues, patterns, conditioned responses, fears, habits, and attitudes that we want to change. Looking below the surface of our problems and issues, we find causes and, thus, have more information available to help us change, heal, and grow.

Consciousness is one of the five aggregates because it is such an important part - I would say the most important part - of what we are. Because consciousness, in the end, is what defines us - because we identify with it so powerfully - we also hold on to it very strongly.

As long as we have attachments and craving we will get reborn, and thus suffer. The only way to end suffering is therefore to overcome our attachment to consciousness.

To end our attachment to consciousness we first of all need to refine it. Deep states of samadhi are often referred to as refined states of consciousness. I guess this is what you mean when you refer to consciousness being "something to attain". Based on such refined states of consciousness, one is able to gain the insight that leads to the end of attachment.

Observation by Timothy A. Pychyl at www.psychologytoday.com
Timothy A. Pychyl, Ph.D., is an associate professor of psychology at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, where he specializes in the study of procrastination.

Self-consciousness includes three general components: private and public self-consciousness and social anxiety. "Private self-consciousness is awareness of one's thoughts, feelings, and private motivations, while public self-consciousness is awareness of oneself as a social object. The private self-consciousness factor is itself composed of two facets . . . Self-reflectiveness represents rumination about oneself, whereas internal state awareness reflects awareness of one's emotional states. Self-reflectiveness positively correlates with

rumination, depression, and anxiety whereas internal state awareness negatively correlates with these variables . . . suggesting that self reflectiveness may be a maladaptive form of self-awareness, while internal state awareness may be neutral or adaptive" (p. 379).

2. Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a particular degree and strength of awareness. It is the sort of awareness you have when the hindrances are weak, when the mind is clear and bright, and when there are few thoughts.

Mindfulness (sati in Pali) is a spiritual faculty that gives you a sense of being in charge of your mind. Instead of the hindrances dragging your mind into the past, the future and endless thinking, you are able to stay in the present moment and focus your mind on whatever object you wish to focus on. This is why mindfulness is required before meditation really takes off - only the mindful mind is able to focus on an object at will.

Observation by Suzanne Harrill at innerworkspublishing.com:

Mindfulness comes from the Buddhist tradition and is about paying attention to what is happening to us now, in the present moment. It is tuning-in to all experiences, both the good-feeling ones and the negative-feeling ones, in order to feel, learn, and know what is going on within. Instead of shying away from the negative, we stay present and really experience whatever is going on, just as we do when we have fun, joyful experiences. This builds self-awareness and leads to more aware choices in the future.

Much of the time we aren't really paying attention to what is currently happening to us, or to the people with whom we spend time. Instead, we daydream about what we will do in the future or go over and over something in our mind that happened in the past. We find ourselves emotionally reacting to other people or situations when they surprise

or bother us, rather than being able to make better choices with our words, actions, and responses.

When mindful, we really participate in our moment-to-moment experiences—feeling them, enjoying them, or learning from them. Practicing mindfulness moves us in the direction of greater self-awareness, which allows us the power of choice and to get the most out of our life day to day.

To summarize, there are two important ways to build consciousness and move us along on the path of self-awareness. One is to practise being more mindful in the moment and the second is to be more conscious of what is really going on below the surface of our experiences. Self-awareness really is the key to greater freedom and happiness.

Observation by Timothy A. Pychyl at www.psychologytoday.com

Mindfulness is a non-judgmental awareness of one's self, including awareness of perceptions, sensations, thoughts and emotions. As a non-judgmental process, mindful awareness also involves an acceptance of what is.

3. Awareness

Awareness is inherently powerful, and attention, which is focused awareness, is more powerful still. Just by becoming aware of what is occurring within and around us, we can begin to untangle ourselves from mental preoccupations and difficult emotions. Sometimes this can be quite simple, as in the case of a mentally retarded man who managed his anger outbursts by shifting his attention to the "soles of the feet" whenever he noticed he was angry (Singh, Wahler, Adkins, & Myers, 2003). By redirecting attention, rather than trying to control or suppress intense emotions, we can regulate how we feel.

Consciousness and mindfulness are standard translations of Pali words, whereas awareness is not. This means that the exact meaning of awareness will depend on how it is used, that is, which Pali word it refers to.

Sometimes awareness is used for sati, such as in "awareness of the breath", in which case it is simply equivalent to mindfulness. At other times it is used synonymously with consciousness, as in "six-sense awareness". At still other times the expression "full awareness" is used for sati-sampajañña. In this use the meaning is that you have a degree of wisdom about your actions: you know why you are doing something and how it leads to the desired goal.

Observation by Shayly Wright at www.barefootjourneys.net)

(Shayla Wright is a lover of inquiry, nondual intimacy and awareness. She participates in life as a teacher, a master coach, a writer, and an evolutionary friend. She has spent a lifetime studying and teaching inquiry, presence, and the transformation of consciousness. She has a Phd in nondual philosophy, is a certified coach, has a teacher training degree in Soma Yoga, and has completed an in depth training in nondual coaching and therapy with Peter Fenner.)

Contrary to what many people assume, there is actually a big difference between the practice of learning to recognize and rest in awareness, and the practice of mindfulness. People often assume they are the same, and they are not. In mindfulness practice, we are focusing on the content of our moment to moment experience. In awareness, we are not really concerned with the contents--not focusing on them, and not trying to block them out either. Just letting them be as they are. Our focus is the open space, the boundless field of awareness, in which everything is happening. And of course we can't really focus on this awareness in the way we focus on an object, like our breath, or our feelings.

So awareness practice is much more about letting go of the impulse to grasp, to understand, to fixate on anything, and just relaxing into the openness of our own being, which is always here, as soon as we are willing to let go.

Observation by Federica, moderator of newbuddhist.com:

Consciousness means being in the present.
Awareness means you know you are in the present.

Observation by Suzanne Harrill at innerworkspublishing.com:

Awareness is everything that has brought you to this present moment—your beliefs, emotions, feelings, and reactions to all your life experiences. Awareness includes everything you have taken in and are taking in with your five senses: sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell, as well as using your sixth sense of intuition.

Much of our awareness is unconscious to us. As we study ourselves, we become more and more self-aware. This is the key to improving decision-making; to make choices that are in alignment with what we want to create in our lives.

Sources:

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(Juliet Adams, Founder of Mindfulnet.org & Director, A Head for Work)

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The Courage to Be Present

Ancient wisdom from Buddhism for today's therapists and clients.

How to Practise Mindfulness Meditation

Mindfulness is important; how do we develop it?

Published by Karen Kissel Wegela, Ph.D.

Cultivating mindfulness is the key to overcoming suffering and recognizing natural wisdom: both our own and others'. How do we go about it?

In the Buddhist tradition and in Contemplative Psychotherapy training, we nurture mindfulness through the practice of sitting meditation. There are many different kinds of meditation. For example, some are designed to help us relax; others are meant to produce altered states of consciousness.

Mindfulness meditation is unique in that it is not directed toward getting us to be different from how we already are. Instead, it helps us become aware of what is already true moment by moment. We could say that it teaches us how to be unconditionally present; that is, it helps us be present with whatever is happening, no matter what it is.

You may wonder what good that is. After all, don't we want to suffer less? Aren't we interested in tuning in to this natural wisdom, this brilliant sanity, that we've heard about? Aren't those changes from how we already are?

Well, yes and no. On the one hand, suffering less and being more aware of our inherent wakefulness would be changes from how we experience ourselves right now, or at least most of the time. On the

other hand, though, the way to uncover brilliant sanity and to alleviate suffering is by going more deeply into the present moment and into ourselves as we already are, not by trying to change what is already going on.

The sitting practice of mindfulness meditation gives us exactly this opportunity to become more present with ourselves just as we are. This, in turn, shows us glimpses of our inherent wisdom and teaches us how to stop perpetuating the unnecessary suffering that results from trying to escape the discomfort, and even pain, we inevitably experience as a consequence of simply being alive.

The Buddha taught that the source of suffering is our attempt to escape from our direct experience. First, we cause ourselves suffering by trying to get away from pain and attempting to hang on to pleasure. Unfortunately, instead of quelling our suffering or perpetuating our happiness, this strategy has the opposite effect. Instead of making us happier, it causes us to suffer. Second, we cause suffering when we try to prop up a false identity usually known as ego. This, too, doesn't work and leads instead to suffering.

Mindfulness, paying precise, nonjudgmental attention to the details of our experience as it arises and subsides, doesn't reject anything. Instead of struggling to get away from experiences we find difficult, we practise being able to be with them. Equally, we bring mindfulness to pleasant experiences as well. Perhaps surprisingly, many times we have a hard time staying simply present with happiness. We turn it into something more familiar, like worrying that it won't last or trying to keep it from fading away.

When we are mindful, we show up for our lives; we don't miss them in being distracted or in wishing for things to be different. Instead, if something needs to be changed we are present enough to understand what needs to be done. Being mindful is not a substitute for actually participating in our lives and taking care of our own and others'

needs. In fact, the more mindful we are, the more skillful we can be in compassionate action.

How to practise mindfulness meditation

Once again, there are many different basic techniques. If you are interested in pursuing mindfulness within a particular tradition, one of the Buddhist ones or another, you might at some point wish to connect with a meditation instructor or take a class at a meditation center. Still, I can provide one form of basic instructions here so that you can begin.

Basic aspects: body, breath, thought

There are three basic aspects worked with in this meditation technique: body, breath and thoughts.

First, we relate with the body. This includes how we set up the environment..

Setting and posture

Very few people can dedicate a whole room to their meditation practice, so they choose a corner of a room or a spot in their home where they can set up a quiet space.

If you like, you can make a small altar of some kind and decorate it with pictures or photos and sacred objects from your own tradition. You might want to light candles and incense as reminders of impermanence, but you can also have a plain wall in front of you. As long as you are not sitting in front of something distracting, like the TV or the desk where your computer lives, it doesn't matter too much what is in front of you.

Once you've picked your spot, you need to choose your seat. It's fine to sit either on a cushion on the floor or on a chair. If you choose a

cushion you can use one designed for meditation practice like a zafu or gomden or you can use a folded up blanket or some other kind of cushion or low bench. The point is to have a seat that is stable and not wiggling around.

If you choose to sit on a chair, pick one that has a flat seat that doesn't tilt too much toward the back. If you are short, like me, you will want to put something on the floor for your feet to rest on, taking a little bit of weight. You don't want your legs dangling uncomfortably. If you are very tall, with long legs, make sure that your hips are higher than your knees-either on a chair or on a cushion. If you don't do that your back will start to hurt pretty quickly.

Even though we can practise mindfulness in any place and in any posture, some conditions are more conducive. So first we find a relatively quiet place where we are unlikely to be disturbed. We then adopt a relaxed but alert posture. The traditional position is sitting cross legged on a cushion on the floor, but sitting on a chair with the back straight and unsupported and relaxed will do just as well.

Eyes opened or closed?

When beginning practice it is better to close the eyes. Ultimately it is very useful to be able to practise mindfulness with the eyes open as it allows us to expand its application to a much broader range of settings.

Okay, once you have your seat and your spot, go ahead and sit down. Take a posture that is upright but not rigid. The idea is to take a posture that reflects your inherent brilliant sanity, so one that is dignified but not stiff. The back is straight with the curve in the lower back that is naturally there. I was once told to imagine that my spine was a tree and to lean against it. It works for me; you can see if it works for you.

Sitting on a cushion, cross your legs comfortably in front of you. There's no need to contort yourself into an uncomfortable posture. Just simply cross your legs as you might have done as a child. Notice again that you want your hips higher than your knees. If necessary, add more height to your seat by folding up a blanket or towel.

Hands rest on the thighs, facing down. The eyes are somewhat open and the gaze rests gently on the floor in front of you about four to six feet away. If you are closer to the wall than that, let your gaze rest on the wall wherever it lands as if you were looking that distance in front. The gaze is not tightly focused. The idea is that whatever is in front of you is what's in front of you. Don't stare or do anything special with your gaze; just let it rest where you've set it.

Let your front be open and your back be strong.

Begin by just sitting in this posture for a few minutes in this environment. If your attention wanders away, just gently bring it back to your body and the environment. The key word here is "gently." Your mind will wander. That's part of what you will notice with your mindfulness: minds wander. When you notice that yours has wandered, come back again to body and environment.

The second part of the practice is working with the breath.

In this practice rest your attention lightly (yes, lightly) on the breath.

We then use the breath as an anchor for our attention. A repeated phrase called a mantra can be used for the same purpose. However, the breath has the advantages of immediately bringing the attention into the body. Moreover, awareness of the breath immediately focuses our attention on a function that is under both conscious and unconscious control. This is a very appropriate place for psychological work to occur. So we focus our attention on the breath without trying to control it. We let the breath breathe itself.

Feel it as it comes into your body and as it goes out. There's no special way to breathe in this technique. Once again, we are interested in how we already are, not how we are if we manipulate our breath. If you find that you are, in fact, controlling your breath in some way, just let it be that way. It's a bit tricky to try to be natural on purpose, so don't get caught up in worrying about whether your breath is natural or not. Just let it be however it is.

Again, sit for a few minutes with the posture and the environment and with your breath. In and out. In and out. Sometimes this is quantified as 25% of your attention on your breath. The idea isn't to get it "right," but instead to give you an idea that you're not channeling all of your attention tightly on to your breath. The rest of your attention will naturally be on your body and the environment.

Soon enough we will realize we have become distracted from our breath and immersed in our thought stream as is our well established habit. When this happens we gently bring attention back to the breath without criticism or struggle. We have just been for a dip in our thought stream. So we lightly return to the solid ground of our awareness of our breath. It is this gentle process of moving in and out of the mind-stream that creates the de-centering effect described by Segal et al (2002).

Similarly, sensations such as sounds, aches itches and tingles are quite acceptable. We can just allow them to be. When these sensations lead to discursive thoughts, such as: "I wish that dog next door would stop barking", then we treat that like any other thought. So we just gently return our attention to our breath. .Strong emotions can sometimes be problematic. They can lead to the practitioner being overwhelmed by a vortex of intense thoughts and feelings. In this case it is often helpful to be mindful of the changing physical sensations in the body associated with the emotion. As the practitioner watches the fluctuations and changing nature of these sensations, the sense of being overwhelmed can often be replaced with interest or even curiosity about the experience.

We use the breath as an anchor as a way of developing our ability to witness the activity of the mind.

As we get used to this the mind settles. It is then easier to expand our mindfulness to include:

• Subtle body sensations - We can scan our body from head to toe or feel our breath expand into different parts of the body.
• Sights, sounds, smells & any other sensory impressions
• Emotions
• Thoughts in different modalities e.g. verbal, visual, musical
• Thought types e.g. planning, sexual, grandiose fantasies, worrying
• The quality of our mindfulness: calm and clear, or agitated, or foggy, or sleepy

Finally, the last part of the practice is working with thoughts.

As you sit practicing, you will notice that thoughts arise. Sometimes there are a great many thoughts, overlapping one over the next: memories, plans for the future, fantasies, snatches of jingles from TV commercials. There may seem to be no gaps at all in which you can catch a glimpse of your breath. That's not uncommon, especially if you're new to meditation. Just notice what happens.

All thoughts including images are regarded as equal while meditating. It does not matter how noble or base they might be; how profound or banal they might be. This is how we cultivate the nonjudgmental awareness that is the cornerstone of mindfulness. So for the purpose of mindfulness they are all "just thoughts".

When you notice that you have gotten so caught up in thoughts that you have forgotten that you're sitting in the room, just gently bring yourself back to the breath. You can mentally say "thinking" to yourself as a further reminder of what just happened. This labeling is not a judgment; it is a neutral observation: "Thinking has just

occurred." I like to think of it as a kind of weather report: "Thinking has just been observed in the vicinity."

Timing

How long should you practise? If you are new to it, try to sit for 10 to 15 minutes and gradually increase to 20 or 30 minutes. Eventually, you could extend it to 45 minutes or an hour. If you want to sit longer, you might want to learn how to do walking meditation as a break..

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, remember that mindfulness meditation is about practicing being mindful of whatever happens. It is NOT about getting ourselves to stop thinking. Repeat: it is not about getting ourselves to stop thinking. It is easy to fall into believing that that is the goal. Many people have a mistaken idea that becoming blank is the goal of meditation. Perhaps it is in some approaches, but it's not in mindfulness meditation. So once again: if you find you are thinking (and you will), include it in what you notice. Don't try to get rid of your thoughts. It won't work and it's the opposite of the spirit of the practice. We are trying to be with ourselves as we already are, not trying to change ourselves into some preconceived notion of how we ought to be instead.

Many people have great difficulty establishing a regular daily practice. Usually it is best if a practitioner links the mindfulness practice into their normal daily routine. Most people have a predictable morning routine into which mindfulness can be slotted. The important thing is that the practice should not be based on whether a practitioner feels up to it on a particular day or not. Instead it needs to be established as a good habit, which is practiced without internal disputation, much like brushing your teeth.

Sometimes flexibility and imagination are required to find an appropriate time and place. People with young children often find it easier to meditate at work in their office. Single parents of preschool

children often find it very difficult to find time. Sometimes they can fit it in when the children are napping. Some people meditate on the train on the way to work in the morning.

COMPLETE GUIDE FOR PERSONAL COACHING

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Mindfulness Meditation Therapy (MMT):

Outline By Peter Strong, PhD

Mindfulness Meditation therapy (MMT) can be defined as: the direct application of mindfulness to the present felt-sense of an emotional complex.

Direct Application of Mindfulness

"Direct Application" means that the individual trains to establish and sustain a quality of relationship with the inner experience of an emotion, called the Mindfulness Based Relationship. The quality of the MBR is the key factor that will determine the successful outcome of MMT.

Mindfulness describes direct attention and awareness that is best described by the term engaged presence. When we are mindful, we are fully awake and aware of what is happening as it is happening, without any thinking about the experience or any emotional reaction to the experience. We simply "sit" with the experience and observe it with a keen interest as we might have when listening to a favorite piece of classical music. But mindfulness also has a quality of engagement in which we investigate the structure of the experience. All mindfulness involves moving beyond the superficial and initial appearance of experience and uncovering the finer and more subtle inner structure of experience. When we listen to an orchestra with this sense of rapture and keen interest, we are likely to become aware of individual instruments and gain a new appreciation of the piece of music that exceeds our previous experience. When this kind of mindfulness is developed, then every time we listen to the music we always discover it anew, even though we have heard it a thousand times. This is the kind of attitude and approach to experience that we

are attempting to cultivate in our practice of The Path of Mindfulness and MMT.

Present Felt Sense

The term "Present Felt Sense" of an emotional complex is the general quality of feeling that surrounds the emotion. An emotion is different than a feeling, because it has form. An emotion is a constellation of thinking, physical sensations, actions and speech. If you think of anger as an example, to be angry requires changes in facial expression, tightening in various muscle groups throughout the body, an increase in heart rate and changes in behavior. These actions are aggregated around a collage of different feelings, beliefs and patterns of thinking. All of these components are part of the emotional reaction we call anger.

A feeling does not have form, but is a property in the same way that the color yellow is a property of a lemon. An emotion has a certain felt sense, a certain quality of feeling energy, called vedana. In Buddhist terms, this general undifferentiated feeling energy can be positive, negative or neutral. The negative form is called dukkhavedana and is the feeling sense that accompanies dukkha or emotional suffering and agitation.

What the Buddha discovered over 2500 years ago, is that this very process of listening with mindfulness and opening to the unfolding orchestra of our own experience, including the experience of emotional suffering, or dukkha, creates the right conditions for transformation. All emotional suffering is comprised of psychological feeling energy, vedana that has become locked into specific mental formations, sankharas that take the form of an emotional reaction, a behavioral reaction or even a bodily reaction.

Dukkha

Dukkha is a state of psychological instability and the psyche will always move in a direction that leads to the resolution of this instability, if given the freedom to change. This automatic tendency towards resolution, I call Psychological Homeostasis and which corresponds to the same principle of physiological, biochemical and immunological homeostasis that occurs spontaneously in the body. However, the absolutely essential factor required for homeostasis to work in either the body or the mind is FREEDOM: the freedom to move and change in an intelligent direction that leads towards the resolution of instability and the cessation of dukkha. Mindfulness is the perfection of relationship to our experience that brings this essential quality of freedom to dukkha and creates the ideal conditions in which emotional conflict can transform and resolve itself. A therapeutic space opens around the dukkha and the dukkha responds by changing, transforming in a direction that leads towards resolution. We can feel this process transformation as it is occurring by monitoring changes in feeling tone. When transformation leads to resolution there is a felt shift from dukkhavedana to sukhavedana, the more positive form of feeling energy. Eventually, when resolution is complete, the feeling energy changes further to a state of greater stability in which the felt sense is neutral, balanced and in equilibrium and this is called upekkhavedana. This latter quality of feeling is accompanied by a sense of well-being and vitality as energy is released back into the psyche.

Transformation and resolution

The mechanism of transformation and resolution

The mechanism of transformation and resolution is primarily experiential, which means that changes evolve from the immediate present experience of the emotion, rather than from our views and beliefs about the experience. Of course, mindfulness, or sati is all about being present for our experience as it arises and unfolds in the present moment. The path of experiential transformation and resolution is unique to each person and each session of MMT. Typically, there will be a differentiation of feelings, memories and word-symbols that seem to fit with the feelings that are experienced. Almost all clients will notice some form of experiential imagery that seems to resonate with the felt sense of the experience. The mind thinks in pictures and uses visual representations to organize experience. Many of us are not aware of this internal imagery, but when we focus mindfulness on the felt sense of an emotion we create the right state of awareness and sensitivity in which imagery will arise. Experiential imagery is imagery that arises from our present felt experience, rather than a visualization that we create and it provides an extraordinarily powerful medium for promoting the transformation and resolution of dukkha.

The process of MMT

1. Recognition

The first phase of Mindfulness Meditation Therapy is primarily about learning to recognize reactions as and when they arise and replace ignorance with awareness. This is the first function of mindfulness, the factor of RECOGNITION. Without this most basic first step nothing can change, but with awareness comes the possibility of change. Recognition is the beginning of the transformational process

and often this skill alone is sufficient to totally change the whole reactive dynamic between two people.

2. Reframing

The next phase of MMT involves changing how we view the reaction and associated emotional energy. This is called "reframing" and is one of a number of skills that is taught in the psychological science of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) and which is another chief modality used in MMT. Normally, (ie when we are unaware) we blindly identify with emotional reactions and literally become the reaction. When a reaction of feeling hurt arises we become the emotional reaction of hurting. Anger arises and we become angry. We say "I am upset," or "I am angry?" because we literally take on the entire identity of the emotion. During reframing, we learn to stop this automatic process of subjective identification and see the reaction as simply an object that is not self, but simply a phenomenon that has arisen in our consciousness due to various causes and conditions.

When the reaction of feeling upset arises, we now see it as an object within us, rather like a bubble rising in a pond. The bubble is not the pond, but simply an object that arises within the pond and the emotion is not our self, but simply a small part that arises within our experience. After reframing the emotion, we learn to say, "I notice a feeling of hurting within me" or "I notice anger arising in my mind." This is a very important step, because it counteracts the habitual tendency to react and opens up a sense of space and choices around the emotion. You cannot relate to something with any sense of presence and engagement if you are gripped by reactivity: reactivity inhibits relationship. Only when you can form a pure and direct relationship with an experience, including emotional suffering, will presence and engagement be possible and without complete presence, nothing can change.

3. Relationship

The third phase of MMT, after Recognition and Reframing is the most important step of forming a Relationship with the internal felt-sense of the emotional reaction. Let us explore this in more detail. Once you have recognized a reaction and made it into an object that you can see and experience, then you begin to see the emotional reaction as an object to be investigated and known in its own right, rather than getting entangled in the storyline of the emotion, which is our usual tendency. The storyline may be very compelling and you may feel very offended or hurt, but indulging in negative, emotionally charged thinking is seldom an effective tool for resolving emotional conflict, internally or externally. This is the first function of mindfulness: learning to recognize a reaction, seeing it as an object and not getting seduced into further reactivity.

The Mindfulness Based Relationship

The kind of relationship that we cultivate in MMT is called the Mindfulness Based Relationship. This relationship has certain unique qualities.

The first and most important quality is non-reactivity.

By learning to recognize reactivity, we can stop the tendency to proliferate further reactivity in the form of reactive thinking, or further emotional reactions of aversion and displeasure.

The second quality is caring.

The second characteristic of the mindfulness-based relationship is about opening our heart and mind and developing a quality of genuine caring towards the inner pain of our anger or resentment. Instead of turning away, we turn towards our suffering or the suffering of others. This does not mean that we indulge in feeling

sorry for ourselves and certainly it does not mean that we indulge in reactive thinking, such as worrying. Rather, we learn to be fully present with our inner felt experience of an emotion with a keen level of attention.

The third quality is investigation.

We turn towards our pain, we become attentive and then we take this further step and investigate the deeper inner structure of the experience. This has a profound effect on whatever is observed and the observed responds by differentiating into its component parts. What seemed like the solid emotion of anger or resentment, fear or anxiety begins to unfold into a complex interior landscape of subtle feelings and memories and very often, some form of experiential imagery.

4. Experiential Transformation

This is the fourth phase of MMT. The term "experiential" is a very important term in mindfulness work and MMT and has a very specific meaning. By "experiential" we mean that we allow experience to unfold in its own way and in its own time without any interference or agenda or beliefs about what should happen. Mindfulness provides the ideal therapeutic space in which experiential unfolding can occur, because of its open and non-judgmental quality.

What unfolds is often unexpected and unpredictable, but has a very clear felt meaning and felt sense of being relevant and important. The exact nature of what unfolds is unique to each person and cannot be predicted. There is no attempt made to interpret what arises, only to fully experience it with mindfulness and full presence of mind. The effect of becoming aware of this inner detailed structure that arises naturally as we focus mindfully on an emotion is highly transformational. Often, beneath anger there is sadness and beneath resentment there is fear. These more subtle feelings may give rise to further feelings and experience.

During the process of transformation, emotions literally dissolve into many small parts, which can be more readily digested and re-integrated by the psyche and our innate intelligence into something more stable.

Besides the differentiation of feelings and associated memories, people will frequently encounter some form of experiential imagery. It may be in the form of a memory image, a picture from the past. Experiential imagery often takes on a more abstract form of shifting colors and shapes. Whatever form the imagery takes, the approach is always to sit with the present experience and felt sense associated with the imagery and allow it to unfold and change in its own unique way. One person focusing on anger first notices a red color, which takes on the form of a hard, rough rock. With continued mindfulness, the rock begins to change shape and color and dissolves into a pile of white sand. This is not visualization, because there was no deliberate effort to create the imagery; they arose experientially.

The process of unfolding and transformation of experiential imagery is one of the most powerful events that can occur during MMT and is one of the most effective means of producing change at the deepest level of our emotional suffering. How this works is not well understood, but it is generally agreed that the mind thinks in pictures and organizes memory and particularly the affective dimension of memory through visual imagery. Why the anger took on the form of a red colored rock is interesting and of course red is often associated with anger, as is hardness. Why it changed into white sand is also interesting and similarly we can make interpretations of what it means: white sand symbolizes tranquility and fluidity. However, interpretation is not the purpose of MMT; what is important is the full conscious experience of this process of change in the inner structure of our experience. It is this conscious awareness of the process that is transformational, not an understanding of the contents that arise.

5. Resolution

The final step of MMT is RESOLUTION. Resolution is said to have occurred when the emotional energy that powers a pattern of emotional reactivity has dissipated and returned to the psyche, providing energy for new and more positive responses.

Resolution is the state of equilibrium, accompanied by a felt sense of uppekhavedana, which although neutral can lead to very euphoric feelings that can be simply described as the taste of freedom.

Any form of emotional suffering, or dukkha, as it is called in Buddhism, represents a state of instability and conflict in the psyche. The psyche hates instability and will always try to resolve dukkha if given the freedom to change. Mindfulness provides the therapeutic space and freedom in which transformation and resolution can occur.

The guiding principle throughout MMT and the process of transformation and eventual resolution of emotional pain is called satipanna, which means the wisdom-intelligence that arises with mindfulness. This is our innate intelligence that we all possess and which is unique to each moment of experience. Just as water seems to have an innate intelligence in its relentless journey to be united with the ocean, so the psyche has an innate intelligence that will always move towards the resolution of dukkha in all its forms.

Mindfulness provides the conditions of freedom and openness in which satipanna will naturally direct and guide all the subtle changes at the experiential level that lead to the resolution of dukkha. This is also described in Buddhism as the awakening or living real-time insight into the Four Noble Truths: Awakening to dukkha, the cause of dukkha, the state of non-dukkha and The Path of Mindfulness that leads to the resolution of dukkha.

We start with recognizing dukkha, we form a relationship with the dukkha with mindfulness and we allow the dukkha to unfold, change and transform itself in the direction that leads to its cessation. This

direction is literally encoded in the internal structure of the state of instability of dukkha in just the same way that the path that water will take is encoded in the very process of creating instability when we pour water on the top of a hill. The direction of change is always towards greater and ultimately final and absolute stability. This applies to dukkha just as much as to the water trapped on top of a hill. Given time and the freedom to change, that water will return to the ocean and the psyche will resolve dukkha and reach a place of stability.

About Peter Strong

Peter Strong PhD is a Mindfulness Psychotherapist, teacher and author who specializes in the study of mindfulness and its application in Mindfulness Meditation Therapy. He has a private psychotherapy practice in Boulder, Colorado for individuals and couples and also provides an Online Counseling Service via Skype for the effective resolution of anxiety, depression, phobias, grief, trauma and other forms of emotional stress.

Besides therapy sessions in his Boulder Office, Dr Strong provides an Online Counseling Service via Skype for anxiety (Online Anxiety Therapy), depression (Online Depression Therapy) and mindfulness-based therapy for stress and PTSD (Online Stress Management).

Email inquiries about Online Therapy and Online Counseling are most welcome. Request an Online Psychotherapy Skype session today and begin a course of Mindfulness Therapy for your Anxiety, Depression or Emotional Stress.

You can purchase a copy of Dr Strong's book 'The Path of Mindfulness Meditation' at Amazon.com, and Barnes&Noble.com. A Kindle edition is also available.

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Mindfulness in the workplace

How practising mindfulness in the workplace can boost productivity

Mindfulness offers a host of benefits to employers and employees alike, reports mindfulness expert and coach Liz Hall.

Not that long ago, meditation was seen widely as the preserve of hippies and saffron-clad monks, unsuited for the business world. Nowadays, a growing number of businesses are recognising what mindfulness has to offer, including Transport for London (TfL), Google, GlaxoSmithKline, the Home Office, the Cabinet Office, KPMG, and PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Interest in applying mindfulness within the workplace is rising rapidly. Mindfulness has roots in the Buddhist belief system, although there is a tradition of contemplation within most religions and belief systems, including Christianity.

However, what we are now seeing is a widespread secularisation of the approach, thanks to the work of people such as Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of the Centre for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society at the University of Massachusetts medical school.

Kabat-Zinn's mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program has been widely adapted and implemented worldwide, along with a variation referred to as mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) that was developed at the Oxford Mindfulness Centre.

The National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence's recommendation of MBCT as the go-to therapy for recurrent depression has also contributed to mindfulness extending beyond the spiritual arena.

Kabat-Zinn defines mindfulness as "paying attention in the present moment, non-judgmentally".

Mindfulness is a way to train the mind, but also includes paying attention to the body and the world around us. It helps us recognise that we are not a slave to our thoughts and that we can choose how we respond, two strands highlighted by the Mental Health Foundation (MHF).

Interest in mindfulness is also growing because people are seeking ways to cope with the challenges, complexities and ambiguity of our times.

Many are not coping - mental health problems are on the rise, with stress topping the league of reasons for long-term sickness absence, according to research by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2011). People are turning to mindfulness as an antidote to all the doing, thinking and struggling, and discovering it offers much more besides.

Benefits include improvements to physical and mental health, with an increased ability to be resilient and manage stress. For employers, this translates into higher productivity and reduced sickness absence levels, among other things.

TfL, for example, has seen the number of days taken off because of stress, anxiety and depression fall by 71% since introducing employees to mindfulness. Other benefits include heightened emotional intelligence, improved decision-making and strategic-thinking abilities, a heightened ability to focus and enhanced creativity.

Some remain sceptical and believe that mindfulness is just the latest fad, while others are unaware of the benefits or fear being labelled as unprofessional.

As a business journalist and coach, I, too, feared the latter and remained a "closet meditator" for years. However, I soon discovered that many of my clients found mindfulness very helpful. I lay to rest any residual concerns about mixing mindfulness with business after researching my book Mindful Coaching.

My research included a literature review of more than 70 research papers and 80 books, as well as interviews with employers, academics, coaches, trainers, leaders, and mindfulness and neuroscience experts. I also carried out a survey of 156 coaches - the Mindfulness in coaching 2012 survey.

There is plenty of evidence, including from the mental health arena and the field of neuroscience, showing how mindfulness can help reduce stress.

Developing these skills help people become more engaged in their work, more energised and less anxious, and they suffer from fewer symptoms of stress, according to the MHF.

A study of HR managers by the University of Washington says that mindfulness helps us experience less stress and increase focus when multitasking.

Making it work

Mindfulness can be introduced into the workplace in a number of ways, including:

- offering it within leadership and management development either explicitly as mindfulness or as modules on emotional intelligence, self-management, resilience, wellbeing and strategic thinking;
- incorporating it into other learning and development programs;
- putting it into corporate social responsibility initiatives;
- offering mindfulness-based stress management programs; and
- using it to underpin coaching practice and weaving it into coaching interventions.

Of the coaches responding to the Mindfulness in coaching 2012 survey: 83% reported that they use mindfulness with their clients; 74% shared mindfulness practices with clients to carry out at home; 67% used it themselves in the session; and 64% invited clients to do mindfulness practices with coaching sessions.

Some 76% had no concerns about using mindfulness with clients. They use mindfulness to help clients: become more self-aware (70%); be calmer or less anxious (59%); manage stress (55%); be more centred (55%); manage reactions or responses (51%); gain clarity (47%); improve their wellbeing (45%); be more emotionally intelligent (39%); and see the bigger picture (36%), among other reasons.

Practising mindfulness helps coaches personally to: live more in the moment (74%); become more self-aware (73%); manage or prevent stress (67%); and be more available to their clients (65%).

Getting employees engaged

There is often resistance to mindfulness from individuals because it can be associated with "doing nothing". As Langer says, we often see inaction as a lack of a certain action rather than reframing our inaction as a choice to go down another route - one of relaxing, refreshing, renewing, reflecting, or even actively "doing nothing".

Top tips for a mindful workplace

- Sell the benefits and potential impact on the bottom line.
- Highlight the research backing up mindfulness.
- Know your audience and don't feel obliged to call it mindfulness - for example, you may wish to talk about awareness or presence instead.
- Keep it secular.
- Be realistic about how much time people will be able to or want to set aside for practice.
- Encourage little-and-often practice.
- Set aside a room where employees can meditate or go to take time out undisturbed.
- Offer regular mindfulness training programs (whatever you call them).
- Include mindfulness within management and leadership development programs either explicitly or, for example, within a module on emotional intelligence or resilience.

Sometimes people fear becoming disengaged and not enjoying life to the full. But mindfulness is about living life joyfully and more

completely. It helps us "just be" and develop a new way of being, but it also helps us "do" more productively.

Often, it is the label that is the problem. It can help to talk instead about stress management, self-awareness, managing emotions or emotional intelligence.

When Google first ran mindfulness training as an MBSR offer, it did not manage to attract many participants because stress was seen as a badge of honour. However, when it re-branded its Search Inside Yourself program as a way to develop emotional intelligence, the number of participants suddenly grew. Many of its engineers were already aware of their deficits in this area.

There will be different themes that appeal or have relevance depending on the group targeted. If people are going to be bothered to practise, the relevance must be flagged up - and practice is where it is at.

About the author:

Liz Hall is editor of Coaching at Work, a trained coach, a mindfulness trainer and workshop facilitator and author of Mindful Coaching.

Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)

Unlike cognitive therapy, the mindfulness approach makes no attempt to change the content of negative thinking.

MBCT encourages participants to change their relationship to their own thoughts, feelings, and body sensations, so that they have an opportunity to discover that these are fleeting events in the mind and the body which they can choose to engage with – or not.

Repeated practice in noticing and observing with interest and compassion helps participants to realize that their thoughts, emotions and sensations are just thoughts, emotions, and sensations, rather than 'truth' or 'me.'

The participant learns to see more clearly the patterns of the mind, and to recognize when his/her mood is beginning to dip without adding to the problem by falling into analysis and rumination.

MBCT helps break the old association between negative mood and the negative thinking it would normally trigger.

Participants develop the capacity to allow distressing emotions, thoughts, and sensations to come and go, without feeling that they have to suppress them, run away from them, or do battle with them. The goal is that they learn to stay in touch with the present moment, without being driven to dwell on the past or worry about the future.

What is MBCT?

Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy was derived from the original program created by Jon Kabat - Zinn , which is known as Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR). This form of therapy has been shown to be extremely effective at liberating and empowering clients with various medical ailments, including hypertension, chronic pain, and cancer. In addition, this method works equally as well to relieve the symptoms of various psychological issues including anxiety and panic. The original platform was designed to address the needs of people who suffered from multiple events of depression. Fellow developers include Zindel V. Segal, J. Mark G. Williams , John D. Teasdale, Bruno Cayoun.

Method and process of MBCT

The technique is applied through an eight week regimen of therapy courses, as well as at home audio cues that teach clients the art of mindfulness meditation. Clients gain an ability to realign themselves away from their thoughts and feelings and focus instead on the occurring changes in their body and mind through yoga, meditation and breathing.

While undergoing this form of therapy, a client is instructed to recognize their sense of being and to see themselves as separate from their thoughts and moods. This disconnect allows a client to become liberated from obsessive thought patterns that often replay the same negative messages over and over. Rather than being forced to live the mood, the client gains an awareness of the separation and begins to understand that they are in the present moment and the mood is actively existing, albeit at the same time, but not in the same dimension. This insight affords the client the opportunity to heal themselves by interjecting positive thoughts and responses to the moods in order to disarm them.

Long-term skills from MBCT

Participants are armed with knowledge regarding depression as an illness, and are given additional tools to combat their depressive symptoms as they arise. This form of therapy is often used in conjunction with other therapies and treatments in order to facilitate a complete and rapid progression to healing. Clients who use this technique will often be able to revert to these methods in times of distress or when they are faced with situations that cause them to lose their sense of separation from their thoughts.

Mindful way through depression

Source:
http://www.beatingthebeast.com/forum/index.php?showtopic=24868

'Beating The Beast" is an Online Depression Support Community

What follows is "Darkages' ' initial contribution made to the blog's topic "Mindfulness and MBCT - a summary", which was started by "Darkages" on February 3, 2009.

The following are the rough notes "Darkages" took while reading through "the Mindful Way Through Depression", by Teasdale, Zinn, and others.

The book describes Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy, which is a successful blend between mindfulness (aka Buddhist meditation without the Buddhism bit) and CBT or Cognitive Behavioural therapy. I say successful as two studies indicate that in people with recurrent depression (3 episodes or mode), MBCT about halves the probability of further relapse, e.g. from 70% to 35%.

Little disclaimer by "Darkages": this is all copyright Teasdale et al.

The rumination spiral to depression:

- It is not the mood that does the damage but how we react to it (negative reaction starts the spiral: anxious about down mood, down about stress; frustrated with failure to think our way out of suffering, lost in memories or worries, etc.).

- Habitual ways to extricate ourselves from the downward spiral actually fuels the pain we're trying to escape: trying to THINK our way out of our moods, self-criticism: "what's wrong with me? I should be feeling happy!"... The very act of focusing on this "gap" takes us further away from how we want to BE...

The alternative to rumination: Mindfulness.

- Thoughts are ideas (creations of the mind) that come and go like clouds, they are NOT facts or "me"-let them float by.

- Be here and now; STOP dwelling on the past or worrying about the future

- Refrain from trying to fight against or flee from emotions (paper tigers) we don't want to be feeling - WANTING things to be different. Those who put more effort into keeping negative thinking out of the mind end up being more depressed than those who do not ("it's ok, let if be").

Instead, focus attention on a single (neutral) object - the breath. Every time the mind wanders, briefly note what is going on (e.g. "worrying, worrying"), smile to yourself and go back to the practice. There is no "bad" meditation, every mind wandering IS an opportunity to practise!

Stop trying to force pleasant feelings, they are freer to emerge on their own; stop trying to resist unpleasant feelings, they can drift away by themselves.

Reacting to own unhappiness as if to a threat, triggers the brain's avoidance system. A fleeting "unpleasant" memory fuels a chain reaction. The practice is to catch the unpleasantness BEFORE it triggers aversion, which is also registered as unpleasant, and so on... Fight/flight arises whether trying to escape from a tiger or from own feelings (symbolic threat), it narrows our focus.

Challenge of each moment of the practice is to hold it longer than feels comfortable. Welcome unpleasant sensations or feelings - ask "what is this?" to keep the mind from leaping in with "I hate this-I can't do this" (Stef: you don't have to like it, just do it"). Use the body and the breath during the day to ground us in awareness, e.g. become mindful of posture or any movement (doesn't take more time than usual, we're doing it anyway). Notice that THINKING about discomfort or how long it will last creates suffering...

Breathing WITH: pay attention to music AND in the background on the breath. This practice trains us to steady the mind through difficult situations.

Awareness of feelings: locate part of the body (e.g. abdomen) that reacts to stress. Tune in to it regularly, every day. Then, just be with the sensations, or, move into a breathing space...

Challenge: can we be with our unwanted emotions without making them worse? Alternative: suffer & struggle versus recognize & accept those

emotions ("the enemy") so they do not trigger a downward spiral - may run counter to self-preservation instincts. Not easy, but do-able.

Once we notice an unpleasant feeling, focus as best we can on how we experience it IN THE BODY (versus endlessly thinking about it) .

- "breathing with". We use the skills we develop in working with physical discomfort or pain, applying them to emotional discomfort. Keep in mind: Mindfulness is not about getting rid of anything but provides a way to be with IT without struggle, in each moment, as if with a sick (inner) child that needs to be held & reassured. The will still be pain, but more bearable and with less intense suffering.

Thoughts: let them float buy or each time label them as "thinking" or give them a name (e.g. "anxious mind", "inner critic"), and go back to the practice (non-attachment helps intentionally disengaging from being carried away by the automatic negative thought stream, "what's wrong with me" etc.). Mindfulness of hearing & thinking (like images projected on a screen at the movies).

Jade: "simply staying with [thoughts] might be less frightening and healthier than (spiralling off into) analyzing it".

Awareness of emotions by simply sitting- or breathing with meditation.

Everyday-life practice & coping:

The 3mn breathing spaces as "breaks":

1) dignified posture, become aware of thoughts, feelings & body sensations,

2) follow the breath,

3) expand awareness to body as a whole.

Discomfort? Say to yourself on out breath: "it's ok, whatever it is, it's already here... I do not NEED to be happy" (analogy: stop clinging to hope that raining will stop and enter the downpour... Let go and accept/welcome wetness...).

Meditation pitfalls:

Trying to fix things by setting goals, THINKING about the decision whether to practise or not and making "should/shoulds" instead of simply practicing the 3mn.

The critical point: when we feel hassled IS the perfect moment for the 3mn-new attitudes (conscious response of turning towards difficulties instead of fight/flight reaction to moods & inner critic) and persistent practise to counterbalance old habits. Take each "there's no point, I missed too much; give up" or feelings of threat as a REMINDER - a MESSENGER- to practise - don't think about it! Choose: ruminative brooding for 3mn or 3mn practice?

When depressed e.g. at wake-up besides the breathing space also ask: "how can I best be kind to myself, look after myself, right now? What would I do at this moment if a loved one was feeling this way (and look after myself the same way)?"

Mindfulness throughout the day:

1) do one thing at a time;
2) pay full attention to the doing (sidestep analytic thinking);
3) when the mind wanders, bring it back to the "practice" (life);
4) repeat that step 10000 times;
5) investigate the distractions (wandering).

Being mindful in everyday life means to be pure consciousness in everything you do. You'll have to be in the world but not of the world. Be engaged in form and content, but not let yourself be affected by form and content. You will appear to participate, but you will be of a whole different level. This is the true purpose of mindfulness meditation.

Practicing mindfulness meditation in everyday life is the next step in practicing Mindfulness. Once you can make the shift from unconsciousness to consciousness, from illusion to truthfulness, from distraction to awareness, you will find it much easier to apply this state of awareness to everything you do and to everything that happens to you in the external world. Situations will no longer activate your personal garbage of thoughts, emotions and other impressions and yet you are there, present; fully conscious as you reside in your centre of consciousness.

Try this by witnessing everything that happens around you and within you while you live your everyday life. What do these situations in the external world activate in your mind/body system? What do you feel, what do you think about it, etc. Don't get too involved in answering those questions; just remain the witness to everything. Don't think about things, don't judge what you witness, just be. Practise retaining this state of beingness as often and for as long as you can while doing whatever it is you are doing. Always be aware of your inner self and the mind's process by a technique very similar and complementary in nature to the mindfulness meditation: Witnessing the mind.

Mindfulness meditation

Mindfulness meditation is one of the most direct meditations for transcending the mind. It involves becoming aware of the present moment and the thoughts that arise in the mind-field. By doing so, you will establish a natural non-attachment to your thoughts and thinking process. This happens because you start to become the witness of your mind, instead of being involved in it. The unconscious identification with the mind will dissolve more and more when you deepen your witnessing.

There are basically two primary forms of meditating. One of them consists of training and focussing the mind, while the other form consists mostly of mindfulness meditation, plus the no-mind meditation, which is basically the result of advanced mindfulness meditation. When you get the hang of mindfulness, you will gradually become mindless, meaning that all thought activities cease as you become fully aware of consciousness itself.

Practising mindfulness:

Mindfulness is not a meditation in which you focus on some thing or idea in specific, on the contrary; you try to become fully alert, fully conscious as you are, without any modifications of the mind disturbing your beingness in the now. You shift your awareness to the state of being a witness to everything that is, including your mind's content when it arises. It can be practised in a meditative setting/atmosphere but the deepest purpose of this meditation is to make you capable of residing in full and awake consciousness at all times and in every thinkable situation.

When practicing mindfulness meditation as an exercise you can just go and sit somewhere you are comfortable with and become focussed. Don't become focussed on anything in specific; just become focussed, centred in consciousness, aware, as if you are

focussing on being focussed. As if focus itself is the 'object' of your awareness/meditation. This is tricky to understand as you need some experience with it to know of that 'place' or 'zone' that I am talking about, but once you truly know it, you can go back there rather immediately.

The major difference between the form of concentration meditation and the mindfulness form of meditating is that in concentration you focus on content, while in mindfulness it is not about the content of your focus, but about the quality or level of your focus, or awareness itself. Mindfulness meditation is a way to raise your level of awareness, of consciousness immediately, without having to deal with and become involved in the infinite possibilities of content.

While practicing this beingness, this awareness, thoughts will arise. All you need to do with these thoughts is nothing. Don't do anything with them, don't try to watch them, don't try to manipulate them, don't judge them, just don't try anything. Let them be and remain the witness to all that happens. Open up your focus but remain alert. If you notice you are getting involved with thought-forms, go back to the focussed state of alertness, of witnessing and retain this state of focussed awareness as thoughts pass by in the mind. The longer you retain this state, the greater the decrease in thought-forms will become and the greater the clarity and bliss.

Note that the goal is not to notice or become aware of everything that is going on in the environment. This will happen in later stages automatically and it is not even the purpose of this meditation; it is just a possible result of mindfulness meditation. For now, don't try to focus on things that happen, only retain high quality awareness when things do happen to catch your eye or any of the other senses. Don't focus on them, just remain focussed, conscious and let distractions be and pass on their own account.

Two primary stages in this practice will be experienced:

1: Conscious beingness aimed outward: In the beginning stage of practicing this, you will raise your consciousness and become the witness of your thoughts and all else that is going on.

2: Conscious beingness resides in itself: In the latter stage you will not only be conscious and witness your mind, but you will become aware of yourself as pure consciousness. Now consciousness has no direction of focus in specific, it is just pure consciousness, pure beingness.

7 Strategies for Living a Conscious Life

Would you like to get more out of your life? It's never too late to make a new choice or reverse your life's course. One way to live a more enriched life is to be conscious of what you're doing at every moment. This way, you stay connected with your behaviour and feelings.

Here's an example situation: You've decided to stop eating potato chips and chocolate. You make a pledge to yourself to watch what you eat. But two hours later, you suddenly realize you're sitting in front of the television, bag of potato chips in hand.

Now imagine the same scenario, yet this time you behave differently. You spend some time thinking about how to ensure you avoid potato chips and chocolate. You decide to take your junk food over to a friend's house and leave it there. At dinner, you smile to yourself as you prepare to eat a salad and baked chicken because you plan to thoughtfully focus on eating healthy.

The second scenario demonstrates the concept of living a conscious life. Knowing what you want, choosing how you spend your time, and staying in touch with your feelings are indicators of a conscious life.

There are many techniques you can implement to help you purposely live the way you want to. When you live consciously, you're no longer a victim of the wind, being blown about this way and that way by the circumstances of your life. You can create the life you desire with conscious living.

Try these ideas to get you started and inspire you on your journey:

1. Create the life you want one step at a time. Rome wasn't built in a day. Spend some time exploring what you already love about your life. Also investigate what you'd like to change. Then, think about how you can take deliberate steps to create the life you desire.

2. Seek balance in your life. For example, if you disagree with someone, take time to consider the other person's side of the argument. Allow yourself to change your mind.

3. Live in the present moment. You've most likely heard this suggestion before. But what does it really mean to live in the moment? Consider this example:

While you're visiting your mother, think about her and enjoy your conversation and activities together. Avoid making your store list mentally or trying to recall what else you have to do today. Just stay in the present moment with your mother and focus on what the two of you are doing.

4. Know yourself. Awareness of your likes and dislikes is important to conscious living. Learn what's important to you. Discover what makes you tick, what drives you, and what you find inspiring. Self-understanding is an integral part of living life consciously because if you know your preferences and motivations, you can then create circumstances that will enable you to accomplish your goals.

5. Live your own truth. As a teenager, you might have gravitated toward peers who didn't judge you, which made you feel more comfortable. Perhaps, in actuality, you didn't have all that much in common with them. As an adult, you can now stay more true to your own beliefs. When you live your truth, you stay faithful to what's genuinely important to you.

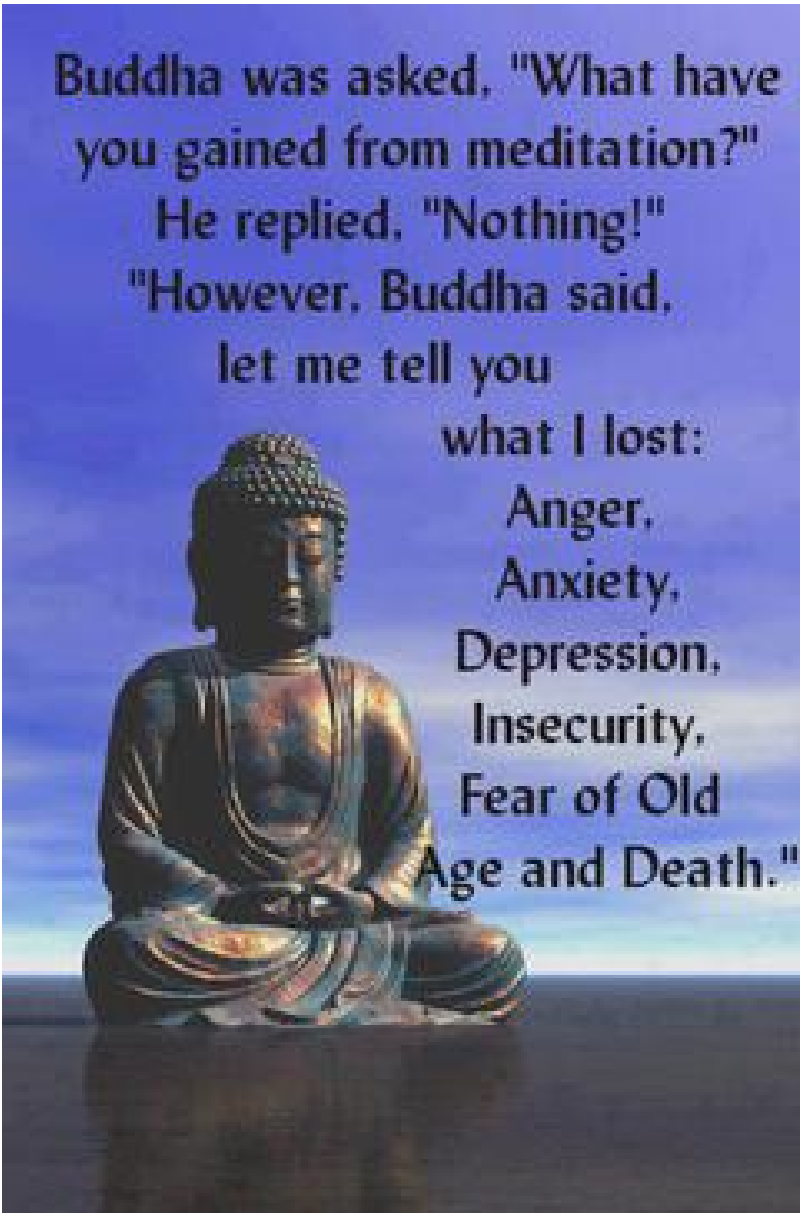
6. Learn to let go of negativity and situations you can't control. Conserve your emotional energy for what you actually can change: yourself and your own life. Now that's conscious living!

7. Take action. Become interested and involved in the goals you've set. Put effort into achieving those objectives and you'll be well on the road to living consciously.

Altering how you live your life can be an ongoing challenge. Selecting just one of the above ideas and putting it into practice will help you begin your journey toward conscious living. Living life consciously will bring you the healthier, more joyful existence that you deserve.

Source:

http://mysuccessprinciples.com/general/7-strategies-for-living-a-conscious-life/


Buddha was asked, "What have you gained from meditation?"
He replied, "Nothing!"
"However, Buddha said, let me tell you what I lost:
Anger,
Anxiety,
Depression,
Insecurity,
Fear of Old Age and Death."

Examples of Mindfulness Training

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1. Urge Surfing – Relapse Prevention

(Alan Marlatt)

Background

Urge surfing is a term coined by Alan Marlatt as part of a program of relapse prevention he developed for people recovering from addictions to alcohol and other drugs. It can actually be used to help with any addictive behaviour such as gambling, overeating, inappropriate sex or any other destructive impulses.

Mindfulness and addiction

The application of mindfulness to addiction is based on the Buddhist view that addiction represents a "false refuge" from the pain and suffering of life (Marlatt, 2002). According to this perspective, engaging in drug use or any other form of mood-altering behaviour is motivated by a strong desire to avoid or escape suffering. To the extent that a person becomes dependent on or attached to whatever provides them with relief, they become vulnerable to addiction. As their attachment to this behaviour grows, their mind becomes increasingly fixated on a "craving" for the relief which this behaviour or substance promises.

Gradually the individual becomes trapped by their addiction as they cling to whatever refuge they have discovered, as though it were the only way to manage the pain of being human.

According to Buddhism, people resort to addictions, not because they are morally weak or physically diseased, but out of a misguided ("ignorant") intense form of attachment to something that appears to offer refuge or temporary immunity from suffering. They want what everyone wants: well being, freedom from pain, an experience of transcending the confines of their lives. But they are simply going about things in a misguided way. They want to avoid suffering; they fail to see that it is their addiction is causing most of their suffering.

All of the practices involved in mindfulness training (e.g. yoga, sitting and walking meditation, body-scan, self-monitoring) are designed to enable a person to track the dynamics of their addictive thoughts, feelings and behaviour and to see them for what they are. Through facing the truth of what they do when they allow themselves become swept up n these behaviours, from a stable position of being grounded in the present moment and connected to their bodily experience, they discover they have choices other than to yield to the seduction of addiction.

Specifically, the potential benefits of mindfulness to a person in recovery include the following:

1) Mindfulness training teaches the client to develop a detached awareness of the thoughts and cravings, without over-identifying with them to the extent they feel compelled to give in to their cravings. He or she learns to relate (with kindness) to their inner cognitive and emotional dynamics without having to react to them.

2) The practice of mindfulness enables the client to see that every human experience is impermanent. Through observing their minds, they notice that their thoughts, feelings and sensations are constantly changing. Pleasant sensations and images rise and pass; and the same is true of unpleasant experiences. This insight is liberating for the

person as it helps them to bear what they regard as unbearable. Marlatt (2002) quotes one client who said: "If things are always changing, my negative moods will also change over time. Meditation helps me to let go and to allow these natural changes to occur, without worrying how I will control them through my drug use. The same goes for feeling high. I cannot stay high all the time, so I get caught in planning where and when I can get high again. The truth is, I'll never achieve permanent satisfaction. Just knowing that things are always changing is a big load off my mind." (p.48)

3) The practice of mindfulness enhances the client's ability to deal with urges and cravings: Marlatt (1985; 1994) teaches his clients to visualise the urge as an ocean wave that begins as a small wavelet and gradually builds up to a large cresting wave. As the urge wave grows in strength, the client's goal is to surf the urge by allowing it to pass without being "wiped out" by giving into it. He tells clients that urges are simply learned or "conditioned" behaviours triggered by specific cues and high-risk situations. Like a wave, the urge response grows in intensity until it reaches a peak level of craving. Giving in to the urge when it peaks only serves to strengthen or "reinforce" the addictive behaviour. Not acting on the urge, on the other hand, weakens the grip of the addiction and strengthens the experience of freedom and self-confidence. Like any skill, learning how to "urge surf" takes practice and improves over time as the client achieves greater balance on the mindfulness surfboard.

4) Mindfulness training fosters the development of an attitude of compassion towards one's experience of pain and distress. In addiction treatment, it encourages in both clients and therapist a radical acceptance of ..."where they are at". Goal setting as a result tends to be more realistic and pragmatic, better attuned to the client's current stage of change, rather than dominated by some black and white set of criteria as to what constitutes recovery.

Mindfulness training has been gaining support as an effective intervention that helps alleviate the grip of addiction. Langer (1998) has defined mindfulness as a cognitive skill that can be taught to

counter the "mindless" state of addiction "in which one is bound by rigid cognitive dichotomies (e.g. using or not using) and a reliance on alcohol and drugs as the only available means of escaping stress and anxiety" (Marlatt et al., 2004).

Teasdale described mindfulness as a skill that enabled people to assume freer and more flexible ways of thinking about their experiences (Teasdale et al., 1995). Rather than see a particular thought as "irrational" and try to change it through argument and debate within one's own mind, Teasdale saw that we could learn to simply acknowledge a negative thought for what it was (i.e. a well-worn habit of the mind, that probably at some point in our development served a supposed self-protective function), and let it be, without investing it with the power of truth. For Teasdale, mindfulness worked at the meta-cognitive level rather than directly on passing thoughts and feelings.

Adapting this meta-cognitive perspective to addiction, Toneatto (1999) proposed that mindfulness training could teach an addict to adopt a different attitude to their experiences of craving, where he or she could learn to experience the craving on a moment-by moment basis with an attitude of acceptance. The goal for the addict is to get to a place where they could see through the fiction that the substance they desired would solve these cravings. By being able to tolerate the intensity of their cravings on a moment-by moment basis (i.e. the stimulus), without yielding to the pressure to achieve a quick fix (i.e. the response), Toneatto believed that an addict could break their usual conditioned behavioural routine.

The Deora mindfulness program (DMP) The Deora 8-week course in mindfulness training introduced an additional intervention within the Deora service in Dublin's north inner city, to support individuals in their recovery. Participants learned to use mindfulness to bring their attention into the present moment and become aware of what is happening within them and around them; they learned to pay attention in a particular way to their body sensations, feelings and thoughts, i.e. to allow themselves to notice what is happening in each

of these domains of experience, without judging themselves, without suppressing or running away from their experience, and to disengage from familiar negative thinking patterns that heighten distress and inevitably lead to self-destructive coping strategies.

The long term objective of this practice was to enable participants to be aware of those thoughts, feelings, urges and subtle behaviour patterns that led to relapse and to enable them to cope with their vulnerabilities in a more creative way.

The Deora program was an 8-week structured course based on Jon Kabat-Zinn's (1990) Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) course. This course was designed by Kabat-Zinn to teach patients in a general hospital setting to cope with stress and physical pain. It incorporates an introduction to basic meditation techniques, Hatha Yoga, Body-Scan training and stress management. In addition to these elements that constitute MBSR, the Deora program also incorporates elements of Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) - a program that adapts mindfulness training for individuals recovering from severe mental health problems and incorporates some generic cognitive therapy skills training (Segal et al., 2002). The evidence base for both of these programs is considerable (see for example, Baer (2006) for a review of the effectiveness of mindfulness training with different care groups).

In recent years, Alan Marlatt and his colleagues in Seattle Washington, USA have been incorporating mindfulness in their approach to relapse prevention with addicted people. They have just produced a course which combines core strategies to prevent relapse within the 8 week course structure developed by Kabat-Zinn. They are calling their program "Mindfulness-based Relapse Prevention". The authors met with Alan Marlatt and had some training in his approach to input into their work in Deora. Any future developments of this approach would do well to consider adopting his approach, as it is customised particularly for people in recovery from drug addiction, and incorporates evidence-based relapse prevention strategies.

Urges for substance use rarely last for very long. In fact, they almost never last for longer than about 30 minutes, if there is no opportunity to use. People admitted to a high quality detoxification centre where there is no access to their drug of choice often find it remarkable how little craving they get. If there is no opportunity to use then there is no internal struggle. It is this internal struggle that feeds the cravings.

Trying to fight cravings is like trying to block a waterfall. We end up being inundated. With the approach of mindfulness, we step aside and watch the water (cravings, impulses & urges) just go right past. This is true for everybody, but few addicts ever give themselves the chance to prove it.

Exercise: Reflecting on Urges

Ask yourself whether there have been times when you could not give in to an urge when it presented. Did the urge pass?

Most of us will have had past experiences of urges passing. This is an important strategy to identify, as it can greatly improve self efficacy for riding out urges. The main message is that urges do not have to be acted upon.

Exercise:

Experiencing the Changing Nature of Urges

- Sit with back unsupported in a chair or on a cushion on the floor
- Start Mindfulness Meditation
- Wait for any sense of discomfort e.g. Restlessness, an itch
- Note the desire to move and resist it
- Notice thoughts that arise. e.g. "I wish this itch would go"....."It is driving me crazy"....."This too will pass" - in a calm tone....."This too will pass" - in an irritable tone....."It is not bloody well passing!"....."I would love to scratch right now" etc

- These thoughts are just thoughts. So gently bring your attention back to your breath and bodily sensations
- Note the changing position, shape and quality of the discomfort over time. Be interested in feeling it as precisely as you can. Notice how the shape and intensity changes with the cycle of the breath. Is it stronger during the in breath or during the out breath?
- You might find your thoughts spontaneously going to other matters, e.g. Your shopping list, a fight with you partner, a football game, planning a holiday
- These are still just thoughts. Gently bring your attention back to your breath and body sensations. They are probably different again.

You have just observed the changing nature and impermanence of urges. When you notice the physical sensations with interest, you are directly facing the urges rather than feeding them through fighting them.

How fighting urges feeds them.

Often people try to eliminate the urges by distraction or talking themselves out of them. This usually just feeds the urges and creates the illusion that they are interminable until you give in to them. Suppressing a thought feeling or sensation, including pain ultimately increases it. (Clark Ball & Pape 1991, Gold & Wegner 1995, Wegner, Schneider, Carter & White, 1987, Wegner, Schneider, Knutson & McMahon 1991, Cioffi & Holloway 1993)

For example Wegner et al (1987) conducted a series of experiments to assess the effects of thought suppression called the "white bear" experiments. The bear was chosen because one of the researchers remembered reading that when Russian author Tolstoy challenged his brother not to think of a white bear, the brother remained perplexed for quite a while.

In one of the more sophisticated experiments people were shown a movie about white bears. These people were then given a sorting task

which required concentration. They were then divided into two groups. The first group was instructed to suppress the white-bear thoughts. The second group was given no instruction to suppress these thoughts. Both groups were asked to hit a counter button every time they thought of white bears while doing the other task. The initial suppression group reported a significantly higher rate of "white bear" thoughts during this time.

Prochaska (1992) et al in their study of how people change habitual behaviour, note that most people go through a long contemplative stage before they actually change. This stage is marked by ambivalence.

Argumentation usually results in the client completing the other side of the ambivalent equation thus maintaining a state of therapeutic paralysis. It is reasonable to assume that the same problem exists with the client's internal disputation over the ambivalently regarded behaviour. (e.g. "I have to give up smoking because I could get cancer" receives a reply "Yes but that isn't going to happen to me - at least not for a long time.")

The Technique of Urge Surfing

Mindfulness allows us to bypass these problems associated with avoidance and disputation. Instead of trying to distract from or argue with the unpleasant thoughts, feelings or urges, mindfulness simply makes the thoughts, feelings or urges less important. When we use mindfulness we stay exposed to the thoughts feelings or urges for their natural duration without feeding or repressing them.

In fact, if we just let an urge be - non judgmentally - without feeding it or fighting it (Fighting it is just another way of feeding it anyway) then it will crest subside and pass.

Of course they come back again but over a period of time. However each time you overcome a bout of cravings they become less intense and less frequent if we don't feed the urges and if we don't give in to

the addiction. Moreover our mindfulness technique of urge surfing improves. If we have a slip and give into the impulse we will have increased urges for a while. However we can still apply urge surfing all over again.

Urges can be compared with feeding a stray cat. In the beginning, you may want to feed the cat because it cries for food and attention. You may find that it is a nice thing to do and you feel good for being kind. However, your act of feeding the cat encourages it to repeat its cries and attention seeking. You find yourself giving in each time. Over a period of time the cat grows bolder and other cats join it in crying for food and attention.

You may begin to regret your actions, as a large number of strays are now contributing to noise and other problems. But you cannot resist the feeling of ignoring their cries. You may believe that their survival now depends on you, and that your actions are more important than ever. They have you trapped in a cycle of your own pattern of repeated problem behaviours.

If you make a decision to resist feeding the "cat army," there will be loud and pitiful cries for a few days. In fact they will be at their strongest when you have decided not to reinforce their behaviour. Soon, however, they will come to realise that they are no longer being reinforced, and will gradually diminish and disappear.
Your decision to stick with the action you know is best for you will "undo" the problem that you unknowingly built up in the first place.
Urges do go away, but they may be very strong for a short while immediately after quitting. Knowing that they will weaken will help you to continue to surf the impulses that you feel, especially in response to your personal triggers.

Urge Surfing Summary

Purpose

To experience the cravings in a new way and to "ride them out" until they go away

Preparation

1. Remember that urges pass by themselves.
2. Imagined that urges are like ocean waves that arrive crest and subside. They are small when they start, will grow in size, and then will break up and dissipate.
3. Practise mindfulness regularly and especially notice any impulses or urges that appear. Then we are well prepared to ride these waves without giving in to the urge by using mindfulness.

Urge surfing itself

Practise mindfulness

 Watch the breath. Don't alter it. Let the breath breathe itself.

 Notice your thoughts.

 Without judging them, feeding them or fighting them ***gently*** bring your attention back to the breath

Notice the craving experience as it affects the body.

 Focusing on one area of the body where you can feel the physical sensations associated with the urge and noticing what is occurring.

o Notice quality, position, boundaries & intensity of the sensation

o Notice how these change with the in-breath and out-breath

 Repeating the focusing process with each part of the body involved.

 Be curious about what occurs and notice changes over time.

The key is replacing the fearful wish that craving will go away with interest in our experience. When we do this we notice the cravings change, crest and subside like waves in the ocean. In this way it becomes more manageable.

Teaching Urge Surfing to Clients

It is very difficult for clients to understand urge surfing unless they have an experience of it. Even though the idea of watching cravings come and go makes sense, it is a skill that can only be learnt through practice.

Just as it is easier to coach someone how to kick a football, when they are actually kicking a football is also easier to coach someone as to how to surf urges when they are actually having urges.

We can do this in two ways. Firstly we can create a situation where urges arise and secondly we can respond opportunistically when a craving arises spontaneously in the presence of the therapist.

Manufacturing Opportunities for Urge Surfing.

This is not as difficult as it sounds, as there are many kinds of urges apart from drug cravings. There are urges to scratch, to move, to eat, to drink, to go to the toilet etc. When we reflect on this as it becomes clear that all adults including those who consider they have hopeless addictions have the capacity to have urges come and go without acting on them. After all, unless we are physically ill we can all control our need to go to the toilet!

When we sit with our back supported in a chair or on a cushion on the floor and start mindfulness meditation, sooner or later some sense of discomfort will arise, such as restlessness or an itch. Along with these sensations there will be an urge to move. This is an opportunity to practise urge surfing. So we can notice the difficult sensations that go with this and the thoughts that arise. Instead of acting in our normal way of trying to get rid of this unpleasant feeling, we become curious. We become like natural scientists seeing a strange plant or animal for the first time. We try to describe what we are observing as closely as possible. In this way we replace an aversion with curiosity. So we do this by noticing the physical sensation that goes with the urge as precisely s possible.

If we are guiding a client through this process we then ask them to notice:

- The exact physical sensation in the body,
- It's quality:
    - Whether it is tight or loose
    - It's temperature whether it is hot or cold.
- The location of the sensation,
- It's exact borders
- Whether these borders are well defined and firm like the edge of a football or soft and fuzzy like cotton wool.
- How these qualities vary with the respiratory cycle.

We need to watch it for at least five cycles of breathing to get a sense if it.. Does it get larger or smaller, more or less intense or does the quality of it change?

When we find our mind turning to thoughts, notice the thoughts and come back to the physical sensations of the urge.

Opportunistically Teaching Urge Surfing

Sometimes when talking to a client an urge arises spontaneously. Sometimes it can be spotted as a subtle smile on the face as the client fondly remembers using the drug. At this point, the therapist can say to the client: "It looks like you might be having an urge to use right now."

If the client agrees to this, then the therapist can ask them: "How does this urge feel in your body? Whereabouts is it in your body?"

Then slowly guide the client through the questions that define the sensations or the urge in the body.

At first there will be a resistance and a desire to go into the story about the urges. It is then helpful to explain to the client that we can go into the story later. We can explain: ""It would be good if you

could become aware of how this urge feels in your body right now. I'm very interested in knowing exactly how it feels for you. This is an opportunity for you to practise urge surfing. So see if you can just bear with it for a little while."

Then ask the client to define the edges of this sensation, where they are and the quality of the edges, then the quality of the actual sensation itself including the temperature, and finally how it changes with the cycle of breathing. Then you can ask the client if the sensations have changed since you first started talking about it. Any observation of change is good. It does not matter if the feeling is stronger. What is important is that the client can see the sensation is not one solid unchanging entity.

So having done this, it is worthwhile to then divert the client's attention a little by talking about the matter at hand that elicited the urge in the first place. After doing this for a few minutes, it is very useful to return attention to the body and ask the client how the sensation feels now. At this point with their increased level of mindful awareness of the physical sensation, they are capable of noticing how the urge has changed. It has often changed dramatically. When a client has had the opportunity to be taken though this three or four times, they begin to have enough faith in the process to practise urge surfing successfully by themselves.

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2. Working with our unconscious better

If I had to pick one thing to help one become aware of the unconscious, it would be to spend quality time with yourself each day. Here the intention is self-inquiry, to know yourself at a deeper level through contemplation, meditation, and prayer.

Other things that build self-awareness and help you understand what is below the surface are the following:

1. Read a few pages each day in a self-help book that you find applies to your personal challenges and issues.

2. Pay attention to your thoughts and feelings. Journal-write about your conflicts to allow them to become more conscious to you. Feel your feelings – cry if you need to, feel your upset and anger if you need to; allow feelings inside of you to surface.

3. Watch your dreams and daydreams. Look for patterns and messages about your issues, actions, about what you really want. If, for example, you daydream about writing a book often, take this as a serious message from your unconscious. If you dream about moving over and over, you may need to look at your current living situation and consider that the unconscious is nudging you in a new direction, not necessarily to move physically, but to do something different to get unstuck emotionally.

4. Notice if you are envious of anyone. Ask yourself what they have that you want in your life. Then use them as a role model. Observe them to learn how they accomplish what you want to create.

5. Psychotherapy is a supportive way to look at yourself and your problems, to move beyond conditioning from the past, and to find good solutions to life's dilemmas.

6. Ask people you trust to give you honest feedback about you. What do they see as your strengths and weaknesses? Use this simply as a consideration of some things that may be in your blind spot.

7. Remember to acknowledge the things that are working in your life to build gratitude awareness. Make a list every day of the things you are grateful for.

Source:

Suzanne E. Harrill
http://innerworkspublishing.com/mindfulness-and-consciousness-as-paths-to-self-awareness/

3. "Just Worrying"

Labelling Technique

As a preamble to discussing this technique with a client it is often helpful to differentiate worrying from constructive problem solving. Worrying involves repetitive circular thinking, which is associated with anxiety and produces no enactable practical outcomes. This technique simply involves a person labelling worry as "just worrying" and then bringing their attention back to their breath or to simply change the subject of their thinking.

Every time a person catches themselves worrying they just label it again and change the subject. It doesn't matter if a person does it 10 times in one minute or if they only realize they have been worrying after a period of 2 hours and then apply the technique. The important thing is that the person applies the technique when they realize they are worrying.

This technique involves no criticism or internal struggle, just simple non-judgemental labelling. Therefore it is important in this regard that the client does not change the label from "just worrying" to "don't worry".

This technique is very powerful and most people find that their worrying thoughts dissipate almost totally within a few days. Then they usually start worrying about a week later because they have forgotten about the technique through lack of need to use it. At that point a reminder of the technique usually suffices.

The same technique can be applied to other disturbing repetitive mental events using labels such as "just doubting" or "just criticizing". This is subtly but significantly different to avoidance. It is not running away from the aversive mental stimulus. Rather it is the non-judgemental labelling which is encapsulated in the word "just"

Source:

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4. Coping with negative experiences

Using mindfulness to cope with negative experiences (thoughts, feelings, events)

As we become more practised at using mindfulness for breathing, body sensations and routine daily activities, so we can then learn to be mindful of our thoughts and feelings, to become observers, and then more accepting of them. This results in less distressing feelings, and increases our ability to enjoy our lives.

With mindfulness, even the most disturbing sensations, feelings, thoughts, and experiences, can be viewed from a wider perspective as passing events in the mind, rather than as "us", or as being necessarily true. (Brantley 2003)

When we are more practised in using mindfulness, we can use it even in times of intense distress, by becoming mindful of the actual experience as an observer, using mindful breathing and focussing our attention on the breathing, listening to the distressing thoughts mindfully, recognising them as merely thoughts, breathing with them, allowing them to happen without believing them or arguing with them. If thoughts are too strong or loud, then we can move our attention to our breath, the body, or to sounds around us.

Jon Kabat-Zinn uses the example of waves to help explain mindfulness.

Think of your mind as the surface of a lake or an ocean. There are always waves on the water, sometimes big, sometimes small, sometimes almost imperceptible. The water's waves are churned up by winds, which come and go and vary in direction and intensity, just as do the winds of stress and change in our lives, which stir up waves in our mind. It's possible to find shelter from much of the wind that agitates the mind. Whatever we might do to prevent them, the winds of life and of the mind will blow.

"You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf"
(Kabat-Zinn 2004)

source:

www.getselfhelp.co.uk/mindfulness.htm www.get.gg

5. Some Basic Training Exercises

Exercise Text found at: : http://www.mindfulnessinfo.com

Exercise 1: Mindful Breathing/Anapanasati

Anapanasati is essentially Samadhi focused on your breathing. In other words, your breathing becomes the object of meditation and concentration. Like Samadhi, this is a skill that requires practice. Also like Samadhi, Anapanasati has the benefits of relaxation, stress reduction, and building the capacity for maintained concentration. In many ways, Anapanasati is the final step before beginning the practice of Vipasanna.

To practice Anapanasati, begin by taking a few deep breaths to relax. Now, breathe normally through your nose and pay attention to your inhalations and exhalations. Try to find a spot where your breath is most noticeable. This may be your chest, belly, throat, the tips of your nostrils, or elsewhere. Follow your breath as it moves in and out of you. You may want to try counting your breaths (1-10 and then start over). You may also want to name your inhalations by saying to yourself, "In" and name your exhalations by saying to yourself, "Out." If you need to use counting or naming, use them as tools to help you maintain a focus on your breathing. Do not let them become the object of your focus. With practice, you may no longer need these tools.

Read more:

http://www.mindfulnessinfo.com/exercise-8-mindful-breathing-anapanasati/

http://www.mindfulnessinfo.com/exercise-9-mindfulness-meditation-vipassana/

Exercise 2: Mindfulness Meditation/Vipassana

In Vipassana, the object of meditation is one's own consciousness in the present moment. While we continue to use the breath as an anchor to the present moment, it is no longer the primary object. Instead, we become aware of whatever the most prominent stimulus is in that moment, and we allow that stimulus to be our object. It may be a thought, a feeling, a physical sensation, a sound, a smell, or just about anything else. Whatever it is, we simply notice it without becoming involved in thinking about it. In this sense, we are working toward achieving an objective and non-reactive state of mind. At the same time, Vipassana is not primarily a relaxation technique and we are not trying to flee from reality or go into a trance. The goal is active and objective observation of our subjective experience, without attachment.

In terms of actual practice, try to find a quiet place where people, phones, and other distractions will not be an issue. Wear comfortable clothing and consider taking off your shoes. Sit up straight, either on the floor (perhaps on a cushion) or in a straight back chair. Place your hands on your knees or folded in your lap. Keep your eyes open, but not focused on any particular point or object. Take two or three deep breaths and begin to focus on the present moment. As you begin, use your breathing to anchor you to the here-and-now. As you continue, notice the most prominent stimulus, whatever it is, without engaging it. Try to sit still and maintain focus for 20 minutes. Just as you are not reacting impulsively to the thoughts or feelings that you have, do not react impulsively to physical discomforts as they arise. For instance, if your nose itches, do not immediately reach up to scratch it. If you want, you can choose to scratch your nose. Or, if you want, you can choose just to let it be. Whatever you decide, act in mindfulness and with intentionality.

Exercise 3: The Park Bench

Imagine you are sitting on a park bench. As people pass by you, notice them. For a time, you allow them to become the centre of your focus. You notice the older woman walking the small dog. You notice the young man jogging. You note their appearance. You observe their behaviour. For as long as they are in front of you, they deserve your focus. If two people are in front of you, you notice them both. You do not need to invite anyone over to your bench to sit down and talk. Nor do you need to get up from your bench to walk with anyone. In as much as you engage them, you do so only from a distance. You observe them objectively from your bench. When they move on and are no longer in front of you, you let them go as you turn your attention to the next passerby.

This park bench experience is analogous to an exercise that can be done with your thoughts, feelings, physical sensations, and observations of the space around you (the three levels of your expanding "bubble of awareness" from the first exercise). Imagine that the people in the park are your thoughts, feelings, etc. Sit quietly and allow yourself to become aware of your thoughts, feelings, sensations, and surroundings. At any given moment, whatever is the most prominent thought, feeling, sensation, or observation is the person in front of you in the park. Notice it. Describe it. For as long as it is the most prominent object allow it to be the focus of your attention. As it fades away, allow something else to become the focus of your attention. You do not need to chase after anything. You do not need to invite anything to sit with you. You are an objective observer. Just notice it and let it move on.

Read more: http://www.mindfulnessinfo.com/exercise-3-the-park-bench/

Exercise 4: Visualization

This exercise has a strong focus on your mental self. Nonetheless, allow it to be a holistic (mind, body, spirit) experience. It involves mental imagery and the use of imagination. For some people, these seem to come easily, while for others they require more practice.

Sitting in a relaxed position, begin by taking a few deep breaths to calm yourself and bring your mind to the present moment. Begin to visualize a place or space where you can be at peace. You may find it most helpful to imagine a new place, where you have never been. It can resemble something familiar, but should be a unique space. It could be a sandy beach, a quiet library, a spot deep within a forest, or perhaps a large sitting room with a fireplace. Whatever place or space you imagine is fine, as long as it will allow you to enter it and relax there for a time. This space can be a sanctuary.

As you begin to see your sanctuary, enter into that space with your whole self. Choose to sit down in your space, to stand, or to walk around it. Look around and take in every detail. You do not have to create the details of your space. They are already there: allow them to come to your mind. Notice the sights (trees, sand, books). Begin to notice the sounds (waves, wind, the crackling of the fire). Notice the smells (flowers, saltwater, smoke). Simply enjoy your space for as long as you want, allowing it to become more tangible and develop beyond what you initially noticed. When you are finished in your space, take some deep breaths and leave.

Your sanctuary is unique and personal. It will reflect much of who you are as a person. As you continue to practice this exercise, you may return to this same sanctuary or you may visit a new space. You may find some spaces appropriate for relaxation and others appropriate for gaining insight. Go wherever feels right for that moment. In time, you may find that your initial sanctuary allows for immense amounts of expansion and exploration.

Read more:
http://www.mindfulnessinfo.com/exercise-6-visualization/

Exercise 5: Concentration/Samadhi Meditation

This form of meditation focuses the attention on an "object." The object could be an actual physical object, a sound, an image, a mantra, or just about anything else. The object of focus is not the most important piece. Instead, what is most important is simply the process of learning to concentrate. Learning this skill will have its own benefits: relaxation and stress reduction. But on top of these benefits, learning to concentrate will be a skill that transfers over to the practice of Vipassana (mindfulness meditation).

In essence Samadhi is simple: First, pick an object. Second, concentrate on it. In practice, it can be much more complicated. Try starting by taking a few deep breaths to relax. You may find that maintaining concentration on the object can be difficult. Every time you notice that your attention has drifted, and it will drift, simply bring your focus back to the object. Try to notice the object like you noticed the raisin. Look at it through a microscope. Take in every aspect of the object and appreciate it. Be patient and do not be too hard on yourself, maintaining concentration on any object can be difficult. Start with only a few minutes and progress into longer periods of time.

Read more: http://www.mindfulnessinfo.com/exercise-7-concentration-samadhi-meditation/

Exercise 6: Mindful Movement Exercises

Source:

Excerpted from "Mindful Movements: 10 Excercises for Well-Being" by Thich Nhat Hanh and Wietske Vriezen. Parallax Press (2008)
http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Buddhism/2008/09/A-Week-of-Mindful-Movements.aspx

Vietnamese Buddhist monk, author, and teacher Thich Nhat Hanh has developed exercises called Mindful Movements. These simple, deep motions, based in yoga and tai-chi, have been taught and practiced in Plum Village for over two decades.

In his new, tenderly illustrated book, "Mindful Movements," he writes: "The Mindful Movements are another wonderful way of connecting your mind and body in mindfulness. They are a way to touch the sky, to smile at your own body, and to touch your heart. When you do them, please enjoy each part of each movement. They are not like aerobics, where you have to move as quickly as possible. There is no need to rush. When I do them, I find I cannot help smiling. I hope they bring you joy."

One way of practising the mindful movements of Thich Nhat Hanh, is to try a different movement for every day of the week Do each one four times before moving on to the next. Have fun!

Mindful Movements

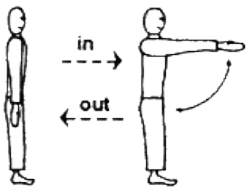
Source: www.wou.edu/~brazaj/mpc.doc
MPC Training Manual, by Jerry Braza, Ph.D. and Doug Parker, Mindfulness Practice Center (MPC), Western Oregon University

The Community of Interbeing- Manual of Practice suggests ten basic movements of exercise that can strengthen mindfulness in our

everyday movements. These exercises can be done individually in groups.

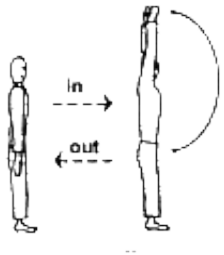
- Each movement is done for three repetitions before proceeding to the next. "Body movements should be flowing and graceful and not too rapid."[1]
- All exercises begin from a standing position with arms hanging loosely at our sides.
- What makes these exercises unique from basic stretching exercises is that we control our breathing during the exercises. On the in-breath we execute a particular position and on the out-breath we return to the starting position.

Mindful Movement 1



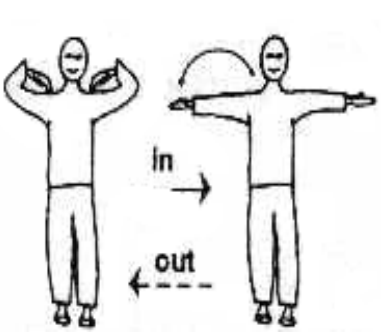
Stand upright with feet slightly apart facing forward. On the in-breath raise both arms so that they are horizontal, hands loose and palms facing downward. On the out-breath lower both arms to your side.

Mindful Movement 2



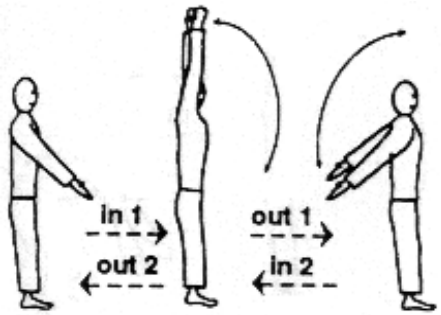
Start as in Movement 1 with palms facing inwards. On the in-breath raise hands above the head keeping the arms straight to make a semi circle in front of the body. Stretch the body with out the feet leaving the ground. On the out-breath reverse the movement returning the hands.

Mindful Movement 3



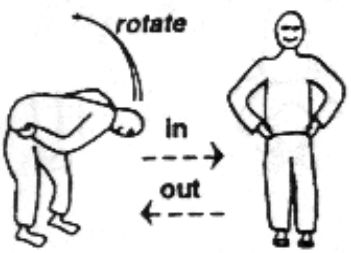
Start with feet slightly apart and arms bent at the elbow and finger tips touching the top of each shoulder. The arms are in the same plane as the body. On the in-breath stretch both arms so that the arms are fully out-stretched, palms upward. On the out-breath return the arms again to the start position.

Mindful Movement 4



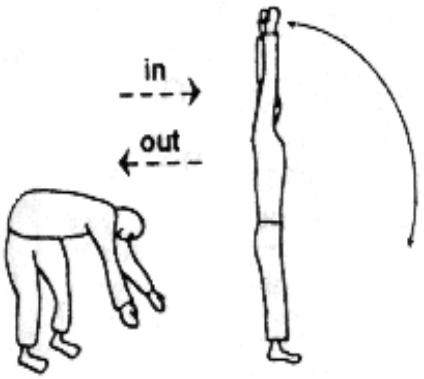
Start with the arms and eyes facing forward. Palms should be together at waist level in front of the body. On the first in-breath lift the arms (keeping them straight) the hands stay together at eye level, keeping the movement continuous take the arms up and out over the shoulders (hands are now separated) and on the first out-breath bring them down behind the body (thus making a big circle with each hand). With the second in-breath reverse the movement bringing the hands above the head and then on the second out breath bring hands down to the start position.

Mindful Movement 5



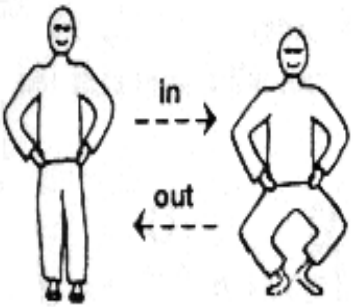
Stand with the feet slightly apart and hands resting on the hips. Start by leaning forward with head at waist level, legs straight. With the first in-breath rotate the body clockwise pivoting around the waist. The head should describe a wide circle and then after the in-breath is leaning backwards and upright. On the out-breath reverse the movement taking the head back to its start position in front of the body. After repeating this cycle three times repeat the movement but rotating the body anti-clockwise.

Mindful Movement 6



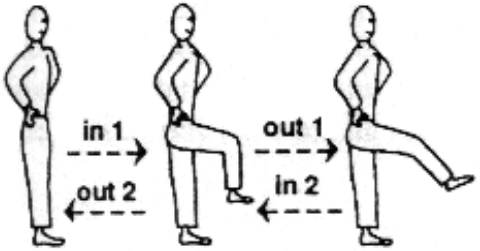
Start by leaning forward allowing the arms to hang downward. With the first in-breath lift up the body from the waist, taking the hands in a wide semi-circle so that the arms stretch upwards. Stretch the whole body. On the out-breath reverse the movement returning the body to its starting position, leaning forward arms loosely downwards.

Mindful Movements 7



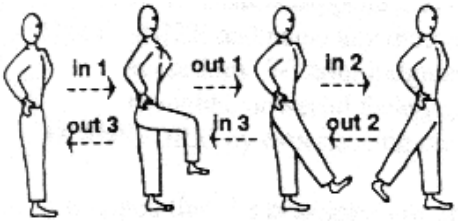
Stand with hands resting on hips and feet together at the ankles, slightly apart at the toes. On the in-breath stand on tip-toe and then with back kept straight up and hands kept on hips bend at the knees taking the torso down towards the ground. Ankles should stay together. With the out-breath straighten the legs and return to the original position.

Mindful Movement 8



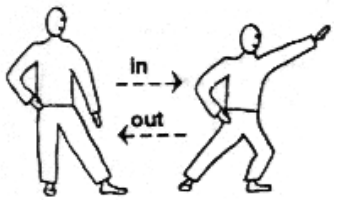
Stand upright with hands on hips, feet together on the ground. With the first in-breath raise the right leg so the knee is just below the level of your waist, the lower leg hanging downwards. With the first out-breath extend the lower half of the leg so the leg is almost straight. With the second in-breath describe a semi-circle with the right foot pivoting around the ankle and bring the lower leg down to its position after the first in-breath. With the second out-breath return the leg to its start position beside the body. After completing this cycle three times with the right leg, repeat three times with the left leg.

Mindful Movement 9



Stand upright with hands on hips, feet together on the ground. With the first in-breath bend the right leg and then with the out-breath straighten and extend the leg out in front of the body with the foot just above the ground. With the second in-breath swing the foot around the body to the side, keeping the leg straight and describing as wide a circle as possible so that the foot ends up behind the body with the toe touching the ground. With the second out-breath reverse this movement so the foot returns to its position extended in front of the body. With the third out-breath return the foot to its start position. After repeating this cycle three times repeat the movement using the left leg.

Mindful Movement 10



Stand upright your feet a good step from each other. The left foot pointing outwards at right angles, to the side. The left hand rests on the hip and the right arm points down the right leg with fingers extended. Your face is looking sideward in the same direction as the left foot. With the in-breath bend the right leg and raise the right arm stretching and extending it just above shoulder level. This should produce a stretch along the left side of the body. With the out-breath reverse the movement returning to the start position. After repeating this cycle three times repeat the movement on the other side of the body (i.e. bending the left leg).

Exercise 7: Deora Core Elements of Training

source: The DEORA Mindfulness Program by TONY BATES and FAYE SCANLAN for Headstrong, the National Centre for Youth Mental Health

Excerpt of Chapter 2 - Learning to practice mindfulness: Core elements of training within the 8-week Deora mindfulness program

"Time and again we miss out on the great treasures of our lives because we are so restless. In our minds we are always somewhere else. We are seldom in the place where we stand and in the time that is now." (John O'Donnohue, Anamchara, 1997)

Human beings find it very hard to be still. We are frightened of our inner lives and spend a great deal of our energies running from ourselves. One of the participants in this Deora program described how having a bath was impossible for him. He simply couldn't cope with being alone with himself. If we are to achieve any kind of friendship with ourselves, as we are, we have to find a way back to being at ease in our own company.

There are many wounds that we carry in our minds and bodies, which make it hard to come into a place of stillness where we connect with who we are. Mindfulness meditation is a simple practice that allows us to come home to ourselves and to rest in the present moment.

It teaches us how to ground ourselves and to achieve a perspective on our thoughts and feelings that is liberating. We learn to see our emotions as part of who we are, but not as the defining element of who we are. Without the freedom that this perspective brings, we have little choice but to behave in ways that shut out our inner lives.

Addictive behaviours are often an attempt to escape distress and achieve an altered state of consciousness that feels tolerable, if only briefly. Mindfulness gives us a different kind of freedom, where we become able to connect with our experience, hold it in awareness and consider more adaptive ways to manage our inner and outer lives. We learn to cultivate a radically different relationship to negative experiences through accepting them and seeing them for what they are. Switching from avoidance and self-criticism to acceptance is a key feature of mindfulness training.

Acceptance is often misunderstood; it is not a passive submissiveness or resignation. It is about learning to accept things as they are; the ability to be in the moment without wanting it to be something else. It allows us to see more clearly what needs to change. It allows us to have a different relationship with our thoughts, where we see they are just thoughts and not truths. Mindfulness is not a harsh discipline, but one that only works when you relate to yourself with a light touch and a lot of compassion.

The objective is to begin to recognize that the mind creates a running commentary and to reduce our degree of identification with our thoughts. This allows us the space to see the possibility for change.

To begin the practice of mindfulness, we need to choose to stop and pay attention to our experience. Paying attention to our experience in a mindful way grounds us in the present moment and gives us stability. Mindfulness steadies us and enables us to rest in the present moment. It also puts us in touch with our innate wisdom and creativity and informs us how we might best address the challenges that confront us in any given moment of our lives.

Steadying the Mind

Try focusing on your next three breaths, without trying to change them in any way. You may find that you can connect with your breath most easily by noticing the sensations in your tummy as it expands and recedes with each in-breath and out-breath. Or you may find it easier to simply notice the sensation of air moving in and out your nose, with each in- and out-breath.

Don't try to change anything, don't even try to relax, just bring your attention gently back to your breath and see if can you stay with it as it moves in, and out, of your body. (If this is hard for you to do, try focusing on your out-breath, and regard your in-breath as a natural pause between each out-breath.) How did that feel? Strange, relaxing, frightening or neutral? Even now as you read this, it may be possible for you to delegate some portion of your attention to your breath, and notice what happens with it over time. Paying attention to your in-breath and our out-breath, you might think that your breathing has changed, but if you observe it more carefully, you may discover that

you have not really changed anything; you are simply letting your breath flow more naturally. As long as your breathing feels pleasant, you know you are doing something right.

You are not trying to change anything; you are simply taking time to bring your attention back to your breath. You do not have to struggle or make an effort. If you do, you will disrupt the natural flow of your breath and notice yourself becoming uneasy. What you are trying to do, as best you can, is to simply be with your breath and allow yourself to slow down and enjoy the present moment.

By bringing our mind into the present moment, we achieve mindfulness. When we bring the mind home in this way, we also become more aware of our body. If we continue to practice mindful breathing, we can find ourselves easing back into our bodies in a very short space of time. We begin to feel more connected, more grounded, and also more alert to all that's happening in and around us.

Breathing is the bridge to the body. Attending deliberately to our breathing helps to anchor our attention in the present moment, and gives us a platform from which we can observe the changing patterns of our thoughts and feelings, as they move and shift from one concern to another, from one sensation to another. It is important to note what comes up for you when you slow down in this way, and then to let it go and see what happens next.

Because our mind so naturally wanders, it requires practice to be mindful. There are many different exercises that can guide your practice and some may suit you more than others. The following are a sample of the exercises we used most frequently in the Deora course.

Basic Breathing Exercises

Exercise 1: In/Out

The first breathing exercise is "In/Out". Very simply, we choose to pay attention to the movement of the breath in and out of our body.

We may notice the sensation of air passing in and out of our nostrils or we may keep our attention on the sensations of our tummies

expanding and contracting as we inhale and exhale. Focus wherever you find it easiest to stay with your breathing.

To help you keep your mind on your breathing, you might try saying silently to yourself, with each in-breath:

"Breathing in, I know I'm breathing in", and with each out-breath: "Breathing out, I know I am breathing out". As you become more keenly aware of your in-breath as your in-breath and your out-breath as your out-breath, just use the word "in" when breathing in, and "out" when breathing out.

You may notice your mind wandering, and when you do, just accept that this is what happens to everyone, and then gently escort you attention back to your in-breath and your out-breath. And if your mind wanders a thousand times, just very gently notice that's it's drifted off and bring it back to the breath, a thousand times. You don't have to suppress your thinking or try to 'control' it in some way, you only have to come back to your breathing and enjoy this breath, and this breath, and this breath…

Exercise 2: Following your breath

Following your breath for the full duration of your breath

The first exercise described above naturally leads into this second exercise which focuses your attention a little more closely on the duration of your breath.

Called "Long/Short", this exercise invites you to let your attention follow the flow of your in-breath for however long it takes, and similarly, to keep your attention on the out-breath for its full duration, however long that takes. The terms "long" and "short" do not mean that you should either lengthen or shorten your breath. They simply direct you to follow the course of your breath, whatever its duration.

Rather than try and control your breath in any way, you are invited to 'get out of your own way' and to allow your breath enjoy itself. If your in-breath is short, let it be short; if it is long, let it be long.

When you take time to become aware of your breathing, you may notice that the quality of your breathing changes slightly. It may

naturally slow down and deepen, without you making any effort to do so. Mindfulness, without you doing anything, brings a calmness to your breathing, and in turn to your body and your mind.

Exercise 3: Paying attention to your posture

As you sit and enjoy your breathing in and breathing out, notice your posture. It helps to embody in your posture the state of mind you are trying to create through your practice. On the one hand you want to find a posture that's comfortable and restful; but you also want to find a way of sitting that embodies a certain alertness and awareness. In practicing mindful meditation, you are not trying to switch off from or tune out reality. What you're trying to do when you practice mindfulness is to wake up to what is happening in your life, in the present moment. And so it helps to sit comfortably, whether on a chair, or a cushion, or a stool, but also to sit in a dignified and erect position, which embodies this state of wakefulness.

Find a way of sitting that allows you to sit for whatever period of time feels right to you. It might be 1 minute, it might be 45 minutes. It is worth taking time to find a sitting or lying position that feels comfortable and that allows you remain alert. A chair may be fine for you, but it is usually recommended that you sit up straight with your back away from the chair, to help you maintain a degree of alertness.

Be mindful of what muscles you need to engage to help you remain alert and dignified, and see if you can relax all your other muscles.

For example, you may become aware of tension you are holding in your shoulders. You don't need this tension to remain alert, so allow yourself to relax and drop your shoulders.

Notice also your facial muscles and be aware of any tension you may be holding there. You have three hundred muscles in your face which can both hold and express all that you feel. For now, just see if you can notice any tension you are holding in your face and gently let it go, by smiling.

Exercise 4: Accepting whatever is happening

Enjoy the sensation of being able to breathe, wherever you are, whatever you are doing, whatever you are feeling. Be aware of the preciousness of this moment and of the simple wonder of being alive. Enjoy this moment; come home to whatever is happening for you. It may be that your life is in a good space. Take the time to acknowledge and appreciate that. Or maybe you are in a really tough place in your life at the moment. Perhaps you feel confused, tired, sad or alone. See if you can allow whatever is there to be there, accepting your pain as it is in this moment, rather than trying to push it away from you. By taking time to be mindful, you create an opportunity to bring a kindness to wherever you are hurting in your body or mind.

Notice your pain, and with care and gentleness, allow it to be there. It's what's happening right now. It won't last, nothing lasts forever.

But right now, your pain is coming from a part of you that has no other way to communicate with you. Try being with yourself, and letting yourself be. Notice how your thoughts try to carry you away, possibly regretting something you did or didn't do, or possibly trying to frighten you with worries about what might or could happen sometime in the future. Notice these thoughts, notice what concerns rise up in your mind and smile. And then ever so gently, let your thoughts be, and return your attention to your breath. Don't fight, don't struggle, just let yourself be, and be kind to whatever part of you is hurting.

It often happens in the course of our practice that some thought or realization hits us like a bolt out of the blue and shakes us to the core.

Perhaps some problem we had been trying to block out of our awareness, perhaps some appointment or commitment we had forgotten.

Because you have taken time to be still, the mind has an opportunity to remind you of something important. When this happens, note what has been brought to your attention, thank your practice for reminding you about this and then let it go, as you gently return your attention to your breathing. The aim of what you are doing is simply to be present to your breathing as best you can, and not become

drawn into endless ruminations. There will be time to attend to these matters later, for now, simply note that they have emerged into your awareness and let them recede into the background as you return to enjoying the present moment.

When the mind is relatively stable and focused, any object in the field of our attention - be it a pressing concern or a piece of music - becomes more vivid and clear. And when the mind is clear, it is more likely that real understanding will be achieved, and that a wiser course of action will follow.

Exercise 5: The 3-minute breathing space

This exercise combines all of the above and when you have practiced it repeatedly, it becomes a resource that you can tap into at several points in your day.

STEP 1: Bringing your awareness back home

Begin by deliberately adopting an erect and dignified posture, whether you are sitting or standing. If you like, close your eyes. Then, bringing your awareness to your inner experience, ask: 'What is my experience right now?' - 'What thoughts are going through the mind?'

As best you can, acknowledging whatever thoughts or images are passing through your mind without becoming drawn into them. Just letting them pass in and out of your mind, taking care to see what they are about. And then letting them go.

What feelings are here? Turning toward any sense of emotional discomfort or unpleasant feelings, acknowledging their presence, and allowing them to be there, rather than pushing them away.

What physical or bodily sensations are here right now? Perhaps quickly scanning the body to pick up any sensations or tightness or pain that may be in your body. See them for what they are and let them be.

STEP 2: Anchoring your awareness

Then gently lead your attention back to the physical sensations of your breath, as it passes in and out of your body. Bring your attention to the movement of your belly. As you breathe in, and breathe out… feeling the sensations of the belly wall expanding as the breath comes in… and falling back as the breath goes out. Follow the breath all the way in and all the way out, and use your breath to anchor yourself, to ground yourself, in the present moment.

STEP 3: Opening your awareness

Now expand the field of your awareness around your breathing so that, in addition to the sensations of the breath, it includes a sense of the body as a whole, your posture and facial expression. If you become aware of any sensations of discomfort, tension, or resistance, zero in on them by breathing into them on each in-breath and breathing out from them on each out-breath as you soften and open.

Whatever you notice, whatever sensations or feelings are there, let them be, they are already there. As best you can, expand your awareness to take in all that's happening around you. What do you hear? What do you sense is happening in the environment around you?

Exercise 6: Extended sitting meditation

(from "A Mindful Way through Depression, by Williams, Teasdale and Kabat-Zinn, 2007)

SETTLING

1. Settle in a comfortable sitting position, either on a straight-backed chair or on a soft surface on the floor with your bottom supported by cushions or on a low stool or meditation bench. If you use a chair, sit away from the back of the chair so that your spine is self-supporting. If you sit on the floor, it is helpful if your knees can actually touch the floor, although that may not happen at the beginning; experiment with the height of the cushions or stool until you feel completely supported.

2. Allow the back to adopt an erect, dignified, and comfortable posture. If sitting on a chair, have your feet flat on the floor with legs uncrossed. Gently close your eyes if that feels comfortable. If not, let your gaze fall unfocused on the floor four or five feet in front of you.

BRINGING AWARENESS TO THE BODY

3. Bring your awareness to the level of physical sensations by focusing your attention on the sensations of touch, contact, and pressure in your body where it makes contact with the floor and with whatever you are sitting on. Spend a minute or two exploring these sensations.

FOCUSING ON THE SENSATIONS OF BREATHING

4. Now bring your awareness to the changing patterns of physical sensations in the belly as the breath moves in and out of the body, just as you did lying down.

5. Focus your awareness on the mild sensations of stretching as the abdominal wall gently expands with each in-breath and on the sensations of gentle release as the abdominal wall deflates with each out-breath. As best you can, stay in touch with the changing physical sensations in your abdomen for the full duration of the in-breath and the full duration of the out-breath, perhaps noticing the slight pauses

between an in-breath and the following out-breath and between an out-breath and the following in-breath.

As an alternative, if you prefer, focus on a place in the body where you find the sensations of the breath most vivid and distinct (such as the nostrils).

6. There is no need to try to control your breathing in any way – simply let your body breathe by itself. As best you can, also bring this attitude of allowing to the rest of your experience – there is nothing that needs to be fixed, and no particular state to be achieved. As best you can, simply surrender to your experience as it is, without requiring that it be any different.

WORKING WITH THE MIND WHEN IT WANDERS

7. Sooner or later (usually sooner), the mind will wander away from the focus on the breath sensations in the belly, getting caught up in thoughts, planning, or daydreams, or just aimlessly drifting about.

Whatever comes up, whatever the mind is pulled to or absorbed by, is perfectly okay. This wandering and getting absorbed in things is simply what minds do; it is not a mistake or a failure. When you notice that your awareness is no longer focused on the breath, you might want to actually congratulate yourself because you've already come back enough to know it. You are, once more, aware of your experience.

You might like to briefly acknowledge where the mind has been (noting what is on your mind and perhaps making a mental note: "thinking, thinking" or "planning, planning" or "worrying, worrying"). Then, gently escorting your attention back to the breath sensations in the belly, as you bring your awareness to the feeling of this in-breath or this out-breath, whichever is here as you return.

8. However often you notice that the mind has wandered (and this will quite likely happen over and over and over again), each time take note of where the mind has been, then gently escort your attention back to the breath and simply resume attending to the changing pattern of physical sensations that come with each in-breath and with each out-breath.

9. As best you can, bring a quality of kindness to your awareness, perhaps seeing the repeated wanderings of the mind as opportunities to cultivate greater patience and acceptance within yourself and some compassion toward your experience. Continue with the practice for ten minutes, or longer if you wish, perhaps reminding yourself from time to time that the intention is simply to be aware of your experience with the here and now each time that you notice that the mind has wandered off and is no longer in touch with the abdomen, in touch with this very breath in this very moment.

Exercise 7: The Body Scan

(from "A Mindful Way through Depression, by Williams, Teasdale and Kabat-Zinn, 2007)

1. Make yourself comfortable lying down on your back, in a place where you will feel warm and undisturbed. You can lie on a mat or rug on the floor or on your bed. Allow your eyes to close gently.

2. Take a few moments to get in touch with the movement of your breath and the sensations in your body. When you are ready, bring your awareness to the physical sensations in your body, especially to the sensations of touch or pressure where your body makes contact with the fl oor or bed. On each out-breath, allow yourself to sink a little deeper into the mat or bed.

3. To get into the most helpful mindset, remind yourself that this will be a time for "falling awake" rather than falling asleep. Remind yourself as well that the idea here is to be aware of your experience as it is unfolding, however it is. It is not to change the way you are feeling or to become more relaxed or calmer. The intention of this practice is to bring awareness to any and all sensations you are able to be aware of (or lack of sensation) as you focus your attention systematically on each part of the body in turn.

4. Now bring your awareness to the sensations in the belly, becoming aware of the changing patterns of sensations in the abdominal wall as the breath moves into the body and as it moves out of the body.

Take a few minutes to feel the sensations as you breathe in and as you breathe out, as the belly rises on the in-breath and falls on the out-breath.

5. Having connected with the sensations in the belly, now bring the focus or spotlight of your attention down the left leg, into the left foot, and all the way to the toes. Focus on each of the toes in turn, bringing a gentle, interested, affectionate attention to begin with and investigate the quality of the sensations you find, perhaps noticing the sense of contact between the toes, a sense of tingling, warmth, perhaps numbness, whatever is here, perhaps even no sensations at all if that is the case. It is all okay. In fact, whatever you are experiencing is okay; it is what is here right now.

6. When you are ready, on an in-breath, feel or imagine the breath entering the lungs and then passing all the way down the body, through the left leg, to the toes of the left foot. On the out-breath, feel or imagine the breath coming all the way back up from the toes and the foot, right up through the leg and torso and out through the nose. As best you can, continue breathing in this way for a few breaths, breathing down into the toes on each in-breath and back out from the toes on each out-breath. It may be difficult to get the hang of this – just practice this "breathing into" as best you can, approaching it playfully.

7. Now, when you are ready, on an out-breath, let go of the toes and bring your awareness to the sensations in the bottom of your left foot - bringing a gentle, investigative awareness to the sole of the foot, the instep, the heel (noticing, for example, the sensations where the heel makes contact with the mat or bed). Experiment with "breathing with" any and all sensations – being aware of the breath in the background, as, in the foreground, you explore the sensations in the bottom of the foot.

8. Now allow the awareness to expand into the rest of the foot – to the ankle, the top of the foot, right into the bones and joints. Then take a deeper and more intentional breath in, directing it down into the whole of the left foot completely, allowing the focus of awareness to move into the lower left leg – the calf, shin, knee and so forth, in turn.

9. Continue to scan the body, lingering for a time with each part of the body in turn: the left shin, the left knee, the left thigh; the right toes and then foot and ankle, the right lower leg, the right knee, the right thigh; the pelvic area – groin, genitals, buttocks, and hips; the lower back and the abdomen, the upper back and the chest and shoulders. Then we move to hands, usually doing both at the same time. We rest first with the sensations in the fingers and thumbs, the palms and the backs of both hands, the wrists, the lower arms and elbows; the upper arms; the shoulders again and the armpits; the neck; the face (jaw, mouth, lips, nose, cheeks, ears, eyes, forehead); and then the entirety of the head.

10. When you become aware of tension or of other intense sensations in a particular part of the body, you can "breathe in" to those sensations in the same way as you can to any others – using the in-breath to gently bring awareness right into the sensations, and, as best you can, have a sense of what happens in that region, if anything, as each breath lets go and releases on the out-breath.

11. The mind will inevitably wonder away from the breath and the body from time to time. That is entirely normal. It is what minds do.

When you notice it, gently acknowledge it, noticing where the mind has gone off to, and then gently return your attention to the part of the body you intended to focus on.

12. After you have scanned the whole body in this way, spend a few minutes being aware of a sense of the body as a whole and of the breath flowing freely in and out of the body.

13. It is also very important to remind yourself that if you, like most modern people, suffer from low-grade chronic sleep deprivation, since the body scan is done lying down, it is very easy to fall asleep. If you find yourself falling asleep, you might find it helpful to prop your head up with a pillow, open your eyes, or do the practice sitting up rather than lying down.

Take some time everyday to learn to steady your mind by attending to your breathing mindfully, and practice drawing your attention back to the present moment.

While the capacity to be mindful really comes into its own when we face some unique or challenging event in our unfolding everyday lives, doesn't it make sense to take some time out from our daily routine and find a moment where we can be quiet with our selves and come home to our inner capacity for stillness and clarity? There will always be thoughts and bodily sensations that emerge and cause us stress, but as we practice mindfulness, what begins to happen is that your capacity to note these and to attend to them, with kindness and appreciation, becomes steadier. And with that steadiness comes a deeper understanding and insight into those elements and experiences in our lives that keep repeating themselves over and over.

Understanding and insight free us from automatic patterns of reacting to our inner world by trying to avoid it, or becoming caught up in repeating past mistakes, and allows us to ground ourselves in the present and make some fresh choices about how we might wish to live our lives.

Mindfulness is not a stand-alone practice. It is one element, or one expression, of a general philosophy of what it takes to become a human being.

Mindfulness comes from spiritual traditions in the East and West that articulated a number of elements required for people to "grow up".

All of these philosophies recognized that it was easy for humans to get it wrong and find themselves confused and alienated from others.

Meditation emerged in each of these traditions as a way of deepening one's understanding of what it means to be human and progressing through different stages of psychological and spiritual growth.

Mindfulness practice does not require of you that you sign up to some particular religion or school of thought; but it works best when it's undertaken as part of an commitment to take more care of your self and to grow in your appreciation and respect for all living things.

Learn from the teachers

1. Teaching Assessment Criteria

The following is a series of excerpts from The Bangor, Exeter & Oxford Mindfulness-Based Interventions Teaching Assessment Criteria (MBI:TAC)

This guideline for assessing the competence and adherence of mindfulness-based class-based teaching, written by Rebecca S. Crane, Judith G. Soulsby, Willem Kuyken, J.Mark G.Williams, Catrin Eames And Trish Bartley, Cindy Cooper, Alison Evans, Melanie J.V.Fennell, Eluned Gold, Jody Mardula, Sarah Silverton, offers numerous valuable clues concerning important facets of mindfulness.

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Domains of competence

There are 6 domains of competence within the MBI:TAC

Domain 1: Coverage, pacing and organisation of session curriculum

Domain 2: Relational skills

Domain 3: Embodiment of mindfulness

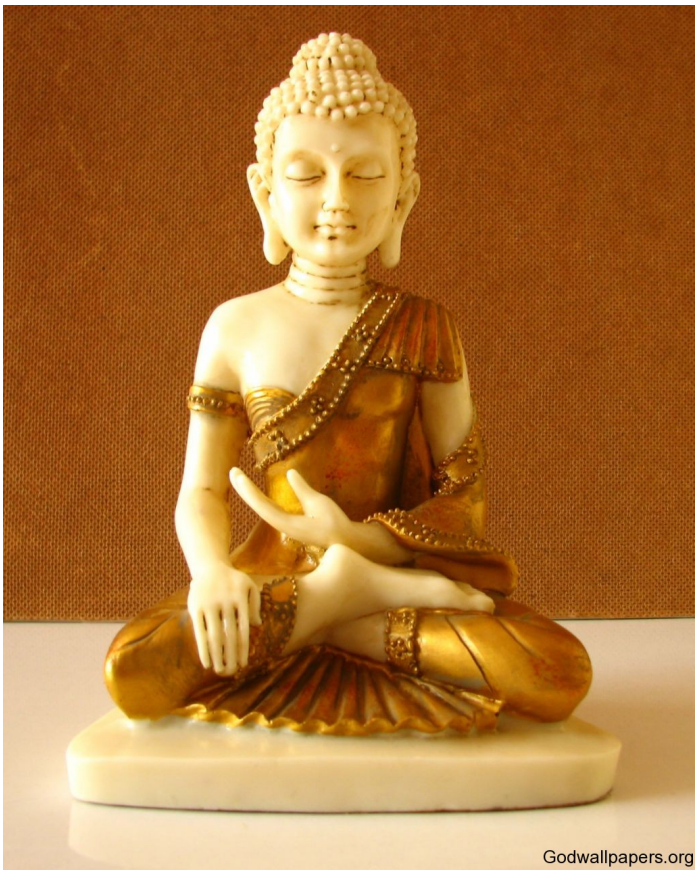
Domain 4: Guiding mindfulness practices

Domain 5: Conveying course themes through interactive inquiry and didactic teaching

Domain 6: Holding the group learning environment

In developing the domains, it was clear that all the competences represented by each domain are absolutely crucial to the overall process - if any were not present, the teaching would have significant flaws and gaps. Moreover, the decision was made to give each domain equal priority in the profile and summary score.

Since what follows are excerpts only, they do not offer a full image of the competences required for good teaching of mindfulness. But then, that is not our aim here. Instead, what we want to do is highlight interesting facets of practising mindfulness:



Domain 1: Coverage, pacing and organisation of session curriculum

Five key features need to be considered when assessing this domain:

(i) adherence to the form of the program and coverage of themes and curriculum content

(ii) responsiveness and flexibility in adhering to session curriculum

(iii)appropriateness of the themes and content (to stage of program and to the participants)

(iv) level of organisation of teacher, room and materials

(v) the degree to which the session flows and is appropriately paced

Mindfulness-based teaching requires that time is given to exploring important issues with sensitivity and simultaneously that time is used in an intentional and focused way. Effective coverage and pacing of the session curriculum offers an opportunity to embody the possibility of balancing working responsively with the present moment whilst holding an awareness of overarching intention. Skilful teaching therefore requires a dynamic balance between staying with the core intention for the session and responding to the spontaneity of the moment.

Generally, the teacher will have a session plan to work to with approximate times allotted to each part of the session curriculum. A key skill is to hold this plan flexibly and lightly, to enable appropriate responsiveness to the moment.

This is particularly emphasised in teaching MBSR, where content is transferable both between and within sessions. The main requirement is that the session themes are conveyed. A teacher may appropriately decide to drop a particular planned exercise should the material be naturally arising through other aspects.

It is important that the teacher conveys a strong sense of intention so that it is clear to the participants that the choice of focus for the time together is carefully planned and particular. Within this it is important to honour the contributions of participants. For example, at times it can be fruitful to use seemingly unproductive digressions to build cohesion in the group or to weave them in as examples of the kinds of mind patterns highlighted by mindfulness-based teaching processes (e.g. recognising rumination in action; seeing the pressure to have rationales for what we do and to search for outcomes).

Domain 2: Relational skills

Mindfulness-based teaching is highly relational – mindfulness practice engages us in a process of developing a new relationship both with ourselves and our experience. The qualities that the teacher brings to participants and the teaching process mirror the qualities that participants are learning to bring to themselves during the MBI program. Mindfulness is the awareness which emerges through paying attention to experience in a particular way: on purpose (the teacher is deliberate and focused when relating to participants in the sessions); in the present moment (the teacher has the intention to be whole heartedly present with participants); and non-judgmentally (the teacher brings a spirit of interest, deep respect and acceptance to participants) (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

Five key features need to be considered in assessing this domain:

(i) authenticity and potency – relating in a way which seems genuine, honest and confident

(ii) connection and acceptance – actively attending to and connecting with participants and their present moment experience and conveying back an accurate and empathic understanding of this

(iii)compassion and warmth – conveying a deep awareness, sensitivity, appreciation and openness to participants' experience

(iv) curiosity and respect - conveying genuine interest in each participant and his/her experience whilst respecting each participants' vulnerabilities, boundaries and need for privacy

(v) mutuality – engaging with the participants in a mutual collaborative working relationship

Domain 3: Embodiment of mindfulness

Mindfulness practice permeates the teacher and is expressed through two interconnected aspects to embodiment – 'present moment focus', and bringing the attitudinal foundations of mindfulness to moment by moment experience. Embodiment of mindfulness involves the teacher sustaining connection and responsiveness to moment by moment arising (within self, within individuals and within the group) and bringing the core attitudinal foundations of mindfulness practice to all of this. These attitudes are non-judging, patience, beginner's mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance, and letting go (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

Five key features need to be considered in assessing this domain:

(i) present moment focus - expressed through behaviour and verbal and non verbal communication

(ii) present moment responsiveness - to internal and external experience

(iii)calm & vitality - simultaneously conveying steadiness, ease, non-reactivity, and alertness

(iv) attitudinal foundations: - conveying mindfulness practice through the teacher's way of being

(v) person of the teacher – the learning is conveyed through the teacher's way of being

The teacher offers a demonstration of present moment focus so these are observable through the teacher's behaviour and their verbal and non-verbal communication. The expression of embodiment can be particularly sensed through the teacher's body – i.e. their posture, physical groundedness and steadiness, physical sense of ease, calm and alertness, steadiness, rhythm and pitch of voice tone, etc.

Formal mindfulness practices offer the opportunity to develop a finely tuned ability to 'read the internal weather' of one's being, which can then be brought to the experience of being in relation with another.

For the teacher, incorporating mindful awareness of their process while teaching offers a way to bring a present moment awareness of all of themselves (thoughts, emotions, sensations and actions) so that they become an embodied example of what is being taught. In particular this allows the possibility of attending closely to the ever shifting 'feeling tone' within the body and of using this invaluable source of information as a barometer to check in with and inform responses to participants. The teacher's present moment focus is grounded through their connection with this personal direct experience. Their responses to individuals, to the group and to the teaching process are informed and supported by this sense of connectedness to personal direct experience – allowing for truly authentic responsiveness.

In practice this process is evidenced by a relaxed calmness, together with alertness, aliveness and vitality shown though language, bodily expression and behaviour. The teacher's sensitivity to personal direct experience influences their choices within the group – e.g. through attuning to an individual during mindful dialogue; through the use of breathing spaces to open participants to difficulty arising within the group; through appropriate sharing of 'in the moment' personal direct experience. The teacher embodies a sense of 'surrender' to the moment and to what is needed now.

Through this 'way of being' there is a clear demonstration to the group of 'mindfulness in action' – a lived example of the essence of mindfulness practice and principles. The teacher operates predominantly in 'being' rather than 'doing' mode. The teacher is immersed in the process.

The teacher will use their attentional skills in both a wide and narrow angle way at different moments within the teaching – at times the teacher will guide the focus very clearly to one particular aspect of experience, and at others widen it, to encourage participants' minds to open to new learning and possibilities.

Mindfulness training develops the capacity to reside with a steady mind, which is simultaneously alert and vital. In this way there is a greater chance that the inevitable inner reactivity which emerges in the form of constellations of thoughts, emotions and body sensations are seen as they arise. A teacher who has this way of being built into him/her through a deep and sustained mindfulness practice will bring this spirit into the teaching process. Thus even within the sometimes charged and fluid atmosphere of a mindfulness-based class there is evidence of the teacher bringing steadiness and calm along with an enlivened vitality and alert responsiveness to the moment.

The attitudinal qualities that are inherent within the program (non-judging, patience, beginner's mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance, and letting go) are taught through embodied process throughout the teaching of mindfulness-based courses, as well as sometimes being conveyed verbally through interactive teaching . Participants are learning to learn in new ways through the modelling offered by the teacher of this way of being with experience.

The attitudinal foundations (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, Ch.2) to mindfulness practice which are being conveyed in this process are laid out below:

- Non-judging – the teacher supports participants to open to an awareness of the stream of our inner and outer experience just as it is, without adding interpretation or judgement – but in a way which enables openness to seeing the internal process of automatically judging it and reacting to it. The teacher and participant are developing a stance of 'impartial witness' to experience. The teacher brings an intention not to judge their own personal or the

participant's expressed experience, but instead to cultivate an attitude of friendly interest to it.

- Patience – the teaching process simply works with experience as it is right now and allows an understanding that things can only emerge in their own time.

- Beginner's mind – the teacher communicates a willingness to 'suspend' judgement and approaches experience with a fresh interest and curiosity. So that rather than seeing things through a fog of preconceptions there is the possibility of bringing clarity and vitality to experience. The teacher supports participants to develop a perspective on our experience that is not based on our history.

- Trust – conveying 'in the moment' (rather than focused on outcome) trust and confidence in the process of bringing mindful attention to experience. The teacher communicates a faith in the validity of thoughts, emotions, sensations and the perceptions/intuitions arising out of connection with these. The teacher conveys a sense of trust in the participants' expertise in relation to their own experience. The practice followed by inquiry offers a structure and a process for enabling us to witness personal experience and an encouragement to rely on the validity of this evidence.

- Non-striving – the teacher embodies an attitude of willingness to allow the present to be the way it is and for each participant to be the way they are. The process is explicitly not trying to fix problems or attain any goal, but rather is intending to uncover an awareness of the actuality of experience, and a willingness to let it be the way it is. The process of mindfulness offers us all the opportunity to step aside from our usual process of endeavouring to 'improve ourselves' and 'trying' to reach a new place. The paradox of the learning process is that although there are clear reasons for us all being engaged in an exploration of how we deal with the pain of our lives, there is nothing to be achieved here that is not already present in this moment. This is

conveyed through the teacher's capacity to honour and inhabit the process of unfolding within the class without moving towards premature explanation or synthesis; or moving into a mode of problem solving or conceptualising.

- Acceptance – the teacher embodies a willingness to see things as they actually are in the present moment, and offers a way of opening to and being with the reality of things without struggling to change them. The teacher models accepting self, others and experience with an attitude of friendliness.

- Letting go – the inquiry process nurtures the development of an ability to stay present and acknowledge the arising and passing of experience such as thoughts and emotions without becoming entangled in the content of it. The mindfulness-based teaching process puts a particular emphasis on coming to know our conditioned tendency hold onto the pleasant, ignore the neutral, and reject the unpleasant, and to see the ways in which this perpetuates our difficulties. The teacher works with letting go of expectations and of needing to guide the process towards a particular outcome, having no agenda other than exploring and understanding the actuality of participants' experience in each moment

In addition to these qualities, Kabat-Zinn (1990) also describes the energy and motivation that is brought to mindfulness practice as 'commitment, self discipline and intentionality' – the development of perseverance and resolve to stay with the process of investigation of personal experience.

Intentionality is a key area that the teacher is embodying within the teaching process.

Intentionality: In order to set the stage for this particular form of experiential learning, a certain sort of intention and purpose needs to be cultivated.

The teacher conveys this through seamless cultivation of mindful awareness within the session. The combination of working in non-striving ways whilst also being focused, clear and directional forms a paradox which is central and inherent to skilful teaching.

The practice of mindfulness therefore encourages us to pay attention to the intention and motivation that we bring to both formal and informal practice, in the class and at home. The teacher is helping participants relate the practice to a 'personally valued vision' (Segal et al., 2002, p.92). This is quite subtle and is conveyed through careful use of language (e.g. the phrase 'try to keep your attention on your breath' has quite a different effect from 'as best you can returning the attention to the breath each time it slips away'); and through the teacher giving expression to the qualities of 'non-striving' alongside 'firm intention' in their entire way of being during the teaching (Crane, 2009).

Domain 4: Guiding mindfulness practices

Overview: The teacher offers guidance that describes accurately what the participant is being invited to do in the practice, and includes all the elements required in that practice. The guidance enables participants to relate skilfully to mind wandering (seeing this as a natural mind process, working gently but firmly to cultivate the skill to recognise when the mind has wandered and to bring the attention back). The guidance suggests the attitudes to bring to self and experience throughout the practice. The practice balances spaciousness with precision. Skilful use of language is key to conveying all this.

N.B. – Embodiment of mindfulness is a crucial underpinning to practise guidance, and should be assessed under Domain 3

Three key features need to be considered in assessing this domain:

(i) language is clear, precise, accurate and accessible whilst conveying spaciousness

(ii) the teacher guides the practice in a way which makes the key learning for each practice available to participants

(iii) the particular elements to consider when guiding each practice are appropriately present

Mindfulness practice guiding offers an opportunity to integrate teaching on the cultivation of mindfulness, and space for participants to experience and experiment with the process for themselves. Given the subtlety of the messages being conveyed and the paradox inherent within these, great delicateness and sensitivity is needed when guiding. The teacher should demonstrate familiarity with the key intentions of mindfulness practice generally and also the specific intentions of each practice

All practices need to incorporate 3 layers of guidance:

1. Instructions on where to place attention (described below in relation to each practice)

This needs to be integrated and interspersed with guidance on:

2. Working with mind wandering

3. The attitudes to cultivate while doing the practice

Guidance for feature:

(i) language is clear, precise, accurate and accessible whilst conveying spaciousness

Guidance on where to place attention

Requirement for accuracy and precision – i.e. clear articulation of what the participant is specifically being invited to do.

Offering guidance on working with mind wandering:

- Being clear that mind wandering is part of the process; i.e. our intention is not to keep the attention one pointedly on for example the breath but to become aware of the activities of our mind as we repeatedly invite the attention back to one particular place. So our 'job' is not to stop the mind wandering but to work in a particular way when we become aware that it has wandered. This way is to:

    - o acknowledge that the attention has wandered (some teachers suggest noting where the attention has gone before returning)
    - o bring attention back to the object of awareness with an emphasis on kindness and gentleness but also with firmness.
    - o do this again and again with acceptance and without judgement

- Offering spaces of silence for participants to practise independently with periodical reminders; the length of silence can increase with the experience of the group

Offering guidance on the attitudinal qualities to cultivate:

Be attentive to the presence/absence within practice guidance of:

- Guidance on the spirit to bring to the practice. Inviting gentleness, lightness of touch, curiosity about the experiences unfolding; balancing gentleness with a firmness of intention; taking care of self; letting go of judgement and self-criticism.
- Encouraging non-striving by reminding participants about letting go of needing / wanting to 'do' anything. E.g. "allowing experience to be as it is"; "seeing if the breath breathes itself and simply bringing awareness to the experience of this".
- Avoiding language which might feed into a sense of striving – words such as 'trying', 'working', 'seeing if you can…' can be unhelpful.
- Spaciousness – balancing silence with guidance, and using language economically.
- Using present participles (attending, bringing awareness' etc.) to convey a feeling of guiding/inviting rather than ordering, to reduce resistance.
- Sometimes using 'the' rather than 'your' – e.g. 'the breath' – to encourage participants to be less identified with the body.

Guidance for feature:

(ii) the teacher guides the practice in a way which makes the key learning for each practice available to participants

Raisin practice

Key learning (feature ii):

Experiencing the difference between mindful awareness and automatic pilot Experiencing how bringing attention to experience can reveal new aspects to it and can transform our experience of it The present is the only time we have to know anything Experiencing how the mind wanders

The Raisin Mindfulness Exercise

Pick up a raisin and hold it in the palm of your hand. Look at it. Examine it. Describe the raisin. What does it look like? What colour is it? How would you describe the texture? Now, feel the raisin in the palm of your hand. What does it feel like against your skin? Pick it up with your other hand. What does it feel like in your fingers? Is it slimy? Rough? Smooth? Soft? Hard? Squeeze it softly. What do you feel? Smell the raisin. Describe how it smells. Put the raisin in your mouth, but do not eat it. What does it feel like on your tongue? What does the texture feel like now? How does it taste? How does the taste compare to the way it smelled? Move it around in your mouth and notice every aspect of the raisin. Bite the raisin and think about what you taste. Now how does the raisin feel in your mouth? Finish chewing and eat the raisin. How did it taste? Describe the experience of the raisin.

This exercise is about cultivating awareness and beginning to learn to focus on the here-and-now. It is about being in the present moment and not missing out on it. Sometimes, much of our anxiety or fear is a result of focusing our thoughts on the future - or the past - and forgetting to be present here in this moment. Right here, in this very moment, those things may not need or deserve our attention.

This exercise (or a variation of it) can be done with just about anything. Try a pretzel or a piece of fruit. It can also be done with just about any activity. What would it be like to notice every detail of

something that we normally do automatically and without much thought? What would it be like to notice every aspect of brushing your teeth or putting on your shoes? Break the activity down into its most fundamental elements. Be right there in the moment. Notice everything. Be nowhere else. Don't miss right now.

Exercise text provided by James Sillcox, sillcox(at)gmail.com
Read more: http://www.mindfulnessinfo.com/exercise-2-the-raisin/

Elements to consider in guiding (feature iii):

- Hygiene considerations – using a spoon, clean bowl, pouring out raisins in front of participants, kitchen paper to hand, may suggest in orientation that participants wash hands for eating meditation before class.
- Offering option not to eat raisin – explore with other senses. Choosing to offer participants just one raisin – or two or three.
- Potential to guide the first one interactively as a group – inviting them to call out 'feeling' words which can give the flavour of what is being asked for here; the next one you can ask them to eat it in silence with you guiding and the next one in silence completely with no guidance (if only one, ask them to eat in silence with you guiding). Inviting letting go of knowing that this is a raisin and to see it 'fresh' as a child first encounters experience. Consider emphasising the attitudes of curiosity, interest, exploration.

In the inquiry there are several areas that are useful to explore with participants:

- Lots of direct noticing of the sensations of the experience from all senses
- Elicit observations about how it might have felt different from their usual experience of eating a raisin
- Help the group to gather the observations about the nature of our minds, the ways we generally pay attention and how this relates to

our well-being; in particular the following themes may emerge in the group dialogue:

(a) if we are on autopilot, we cannot see our moods begin to change or go down, or notice stress rising

(b) the raisin practice can help us realise that there are other things to be seen, that there is more to life than our preconceptions, deductions, opinions and theories; slowing down even the most routine activities might transform them; paying attention to our experience in this 'curious', open way may show us aspects of our experience that we had not seen before; the experience itself is different

(c) the mind is always making associations from present-moment experience to memories, deeper level understanding, stories, etc. but we are not usually aware of where it is taking us; mostly we do not choose where our mind goes; we see how difficult mind states might easily take hold when we are unawares, because analysing the past and worrying about the future can be 'second nature' to us

(d) the difference between eating this way and usual attitudes to eating; impulses around food are often unconscious, powerful and uncontrolled

Body Scan

Key learning (feature ii):

Direct experiential knowing of physical sensations Learning to be intentional about how we pay attention Relating skilfully to the mind wandering when it occurs (acknowledging and bringing back) and to difficulties + guidance about how to handle difficulties (sleepiness, discomfort, etc.) Guidance on allowing things to be as they are – no goals to be achieved, no special state, no right way for the body to feel Guidance to direct breath through/to different parts of the body + taking attention to experience of this Guidance on beginning to notice and relate differently to our sensations and mental states, including boredom, irritation, impulses, etc.

The Body Scan Mindfulness Exercise

1. Sit in a chair as for the breath awareness or lie down, making yourself comfortable, lying on your back on a mat or rug on the floor or on your bed. Choose a place where you will be warm and undisturbed. Allow your eyes to close gently.

2. Take a few moments to get in touch with the movement of your breath and the sensations in the body When you are ready, bring your awareness to the physical sensations in your body, especially to the sensations of touch or pressure, where your body makes contact with the chair or bed. On each out breath, allow yourself to let go, to sink a little deeper into the chair or bed.

3. Remind yourself of the intention of this practice. Its aim is not to feel any different, relaxed, or calm; this may happen or it may not. Instead, the intention of the practice is, as best you can, to bring awareness to any sensations you detect, as you focus your attention on each part of the body in turn.

4. Now bring your awareness to the physical sensations in the lower abdomen, becoming aware of the changing patterns of sensations in

the abdominal wall as you breathe in, and as you breathe out. Take a few minutes to feel the sensations as you breathe in and as you breathe out.

5. Having connected with the sensations in the abdomen, bring the focus or "spotlight" of your awareness down the left leg, into the left foot, and out to the toes of the left foot. Focus on each of the toes of the left foot in turn, bringing a gentle curiosity to investigate the quality of the sensations you find, perhaps noticing the sense of contact between the toes, a sense of tingling, warmth, or no particular sensation.

6. When you are ready, on an in-breath, feel or imagine the breath entering the lungs, and then passing down into the abdomen, into the left leg, the left foot, and out to the toes of the left foot. Then, on the out-breath, feel or imagine the breath coming all the way back up, out of the foot, into the leg, up through the abdomen, chest, and out through the nose. As best you can, continue this for a few breaths, breathing down into the toes, and back out from the toes. It may be difficult to get the hang of this just practice this "breathing into" as best you can, approaching it playfully.

7. Now, when you are ready, on an out-breath, let go of awareness of the toes, and bring your awareness to the sensations on the bottom of your left foot—bringing a gentle, investigative awareness to the sole of the foot, the instep, the heel (e.g., noticing the sensations where the heel makes contact with the mat or bed). Experiment with "breathing with" the sensations—being aware of the breath in the background, as, in the foreground, you explore the sensations of the lower foot.

8. Now allow the awareness to expand into the rest of the foot—to the ankle, the top of the foot, and right into the bones and joints. Then, taking a slightly deeper breath, directing it down into the whole of the left foot, and, as the breath lets go on the out-breath, let go of

the left foot completely, allowing the focus of awareness to move into the lower left leg—the calf, shin, knee, and so on, in turn.

9. Continue to bring awareness, and a gentle curiosity, to the physical sensations in each part of the rest of the body in turn - to the upper left leg, the right toes, right foot, right leg, pelvic area, back, abdomen, chest, fingers, hands, arms, shoulders, neck, head, and face. In each area, as best you can, bring the same detailed level of awareness and gentle curiosity to the bodily sensations present. As you leave each major area, "breathe in" to it on the in-breath, and let go of that region on the out-breath.

10. When you become aware of tension, or of other intense sensations in a particular part of the body, you can "breathe in" to them—using the in-breath gently to bring awareness right into the sensations, and, as best you can, have a sense of their letting go, or releasing, on the out-breath.

11. The mind will inevitably wander away from the breath and the body from time to time. That is entirely normal. It is what minds do. When you notice it, gently acknowledge it, noticing where the mind has gone off to, and then gently return your attention to the part of the body you intended to focus on.

12. After you have "scanned" the whole body in this way, spend a few minutes being aware of a sense of the body as a whole, and of the breath flowing freely in and out of the body.

13. If you find yourself falling asleep, you might find it helpful to prop your head up with a pillow, open your eyes, or do the practice sitting up rather than lying down.

14. You can adjust the time spent in this practice by using larger chunks of your body to become aware of or spending a shorter or longer time with each part.

Elements to consider in guiding (feature iii):

- Start and end by bringing attention to the whole body
- Pay particular attention to detail of body sensations; give examples of words describing sensations – warm, cold, tingling, numbness, etc.
- Give participants the option to come back to the breath at any time to stabilise their attention – remind them of this during the practice Allow the absence of feeling particular or any sensations to be just as important as their presence Instruct to let go of the last body region before moving awareness to the next
- Be aware of exactly where and how teacher is asking participants to place their attention
- Vary instructions between both narrow angle, detailed awareness of a small part of the body, and wide angle awareness of a larger area of the body such as the trunk, or the whole body periodically through the practice offer guidance on dealing with distraction
- Offer guidance which invites participants to move into a direct 'being with' body sensations rather than looking at them from a distance Skilful guidance of awareness of breath within the body scan
- Balance guidance which gives the flavour of being with, allowing, and accepting alongside that giving a flavour of exploration, curiosity, aliveness, adventure.

Sitting meditation

Key learning (feature ii):

- Anchoring to present moment through body sensations
- Dealing skilfully with mind-wandering
- Learning gentleness, encouraging curiosity, learning acceptance
- Mindfulness of 'feel of things' (pleasant/unpleasant/neutral)
- Noticing aversion
- Learning to consciously widen and narrow the focus of attention
- Mindfulness of the natural flux of experience
- Cultivating being fully with experience AND having an observer stance simultaneously
- Learning to receive experience as it is, as distinct from mental labels, stories about it, etc.
- Learning to see recurring patterns in the mind and how they develop, play out, etc.
- Seeing more deeply into the nature of human experience

The Sitting Meditation Mindfulness Exercise

1. When you take your position take a moment to settle into your body and become centred before you bring your attention to the sensations and movement of breath through your body. The mind may wander frequently during mindfulness meditation and you can gently redirect your attention back to your breathing. Focus on your breath for several minutes before moving on.

2. Shift your attention to your bodily sensations. Take note of the contact your body has with the chair or floor and the sensations associated with this. Notice the sensations in your body without judgment, just accept them and reflect on them with curiosity and interest, even if it is unpleasant.

3. Bring awareness to any urges you may have to relieve discomfort, such as moving your body or scratching an itch. Do not act on these urges right away, instead just observe the discomfort with acceptance. If you decide to move then do it mindfully, by observing the intention to move and the change in sensation as a result of moving.

4. You may bring awareness to your environment and listen mindfully to the sounds around you. This is a part of mindfulness meditation techniques. Notice the volume, tone and duration of the sounds without analyzing or judging them. Observe the periods of silence between the sounds also and then redirect your focus to your breathing.

Important points to remember when doing a sitting mindfulness meditation:

• It is okay if thoughts come into your awareness as this is normal activity for the mind. Observe the thought content briefly without becoming absorbed and then gently return to the breath. You may do this many times over, but what is important is that you observe and accept the thoughts and then return your attention to your breath.

• Similarly, with emotions that come to the forefront, just observe the type of emotion you are experiencing (such as sadness, anger, boredom) and then redirect your focus to your breathing.

• Sitting mindfulness meditation is most beneficial when it is incorporated into a daily routine for a period of 10-45 minutes.

Source of sitting meditation exercise text:
http://www.mindfulnessmeditation.org/2012/03/09/how-to-do-mindfulness-meditation-sitting/

Sitting meditation – elements to consider in guiding (feature iii):

Posture

Giving practical information on helpful posture using e.g. chair, stool, cushion. Supporting the transition from 'doing' into 'being' mode of mind: a clear focus on posture at the beginning of the practice helps to establish the intention of the practice and to facilitate the transition into this period of deliberate cultivation of 'being mind'.

Breath

- Anchoring in the present moment: reconnecting with a specific aspect of experience in the here and now
- Guidance on where in the body to pay attention to breath sensations
- Avoidance of language that encourages thinking about the breath rather than being directly in connection with it

Body sensations

- Transition from breath - expand the attention around the sensations of breathing to an awareness of sensations in the body as a whole
- Offering explicit guidance about how to place attention
- Offering clear guidance here on options for working with discomfort / pain / intensity whether it is of a physical or emotional origin

Sounds

- Receiving the sounds as they come and go; listening to sounds as sounds – noticing loudness, tone, length, etc.; seeing sounds as events in the mind; noticing layers of meaning added to the direct experience of sounds

Thoughts and emotions

- Relating to thoughts similarly to how we relate to sounds – seeing their arising and passing away
- Seeing recurring patterns and how these develop and play out within the mind
- Using metaphors to help point towards what is being invited here
- Acknowledging the challenge
- Use the breath as an anchor when the mind becomes unsettled
- Expanding the attention to include emotions, naming these, seeing how they play out in body sensations
- Mindfulness of the full range of experience – choiceless awareness
- Being with and bringing an open attention to whatever is arising in each moment – the breath, body, thoughts, sounds, emotions etc.
- Noticing recurring patterns in the body and mind
- Coming back to the breath as an anchor as often as is needed.

The three step breathing space (3MBS)

Key learning (feature ii):

The learning is encapsulated within the three steps to the practice. Each step needs to be clearly conveyed. Preparing by stepping out of automatic pilot, then three steps:

1. Awareness – Recognising and acknowledging all of one's current experience (thoughts, emotions, sensations).

2. Gathering – bringing the attention to the sensations of the breath in a particular place in the body.

3. Expanding the awareness into the body as a whole using the particular sensations of the breath as an anchor, while opening to the range of experience being perceived.

The Three Step Breathing Space Mindfulness Exercise

http://londoncognitive.com/2012/03/13/brief-mindfulness-meditation-strategies/

(Excerpt from Teach Yourself Resilience by D. Robertson)

"Mini-meditation" techniques such as the "Three-Minute Breathing Space" (3MBS) in Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) are employed to provide an opportunity for rapid-frequent practice throughout the day and in a variety of settings. We can think of this as injecting a short burst of more profound mindfulness in-between ordinary daily activities. In MBCT the aim is to do this at least three times per day, at prescribed times, or as an acceptance-based strategy when unpleasant experiences arise. However, you might choose to do it more often, perhaps even for a few minutes during every waking hour, for a couple of weeks. It's natural to think of the shift in focus of attention involved as narrowing briefly on to some anchoring point or "centring device" such as the breath and then widening to

the present moment and the task at hand, as a way of concluding the exercise and continuing, mindfully, with daily activity.

The following brief exercise incorporates elements from several mindfulness and acceptance-based therapies:

1. Begin by stopping whatever you were doing, stepping out of "autopilot", and becoming aware of what you're experiencing in the present moment, particularly any unpleasant thoughts or feelings you may have the urge to struggle with or avoid

2. Gather or focus your attention on the sensations of your breathing, in the present moment, as you've done in longer mindfulness meditation exercises, while also willingly accepting any unpleasant feelings, by imagining your breath flowing through them, creating a sense of space around them and observing their properties in a detached way

3. Conclude by expanding your awareness gradually, throughout your body as a whole, and finally back to your environment and any tasks at hand, in the present moment, before slowly and mindfully resuming any activities you're engaged in

If it helps, give yourself verbal instructions like, "Even though I don't like these feelings I'm going to actively accept them and observe what happens…" or "Let go of the struggle and accept…" You may also find it helpful to repeat a short word of your choosing (e.g., "one"), in your mind, each time you exhale. This can serve the dual purpose of acting as a "centring device" for your attention while also functioning as a cue-word to help you rapidly recall the state of mindfulness from previous exercises.

You can practice this briefly, for about ten seconds, or turn it into a longer meditation, perhaps lasting 10-20 minutes, if necessary.

Remember, your aim isn't to get rid of the unpleasant experiences but rather to let go of the struggle and willingly accept them instead. However, people often do find, as a kind of side-effect, that unpleasant experiences may reduce as a result of acceptance strategies like this.

Brief Mindfulness Script

Step One: Mindfulness of the Here and Now

Pause for a few moments to become more mindful of yourself. Notice how you're currently using your body and your mind, right now, in the present moment. Take a step back from your thoughts and allow yourself to acknowledge and accept any unpleasant feelings you might be having, such as tension, pain, or anxiety. Be aware of yourself as the detached observer of your thoughts and feelings. Throughout life you've experienced literally millions of different thoughts and feelings and observed many different things. Your current thoughts and feelings are transient, just what you happen to be experiencing right now, sooner or later your attention will move on to other things, and then sometimes it may return to these experiences again.

For now, just be aware of what you're currently experiencing, from moment to moment, without evaluating it, analysing it, or interpreting it. You can have your eyes open or closed, be standing or sitting, it really doesn't matter. Just allow yourself to pause and become mindful of your experience for a few moments. If your mind wanders, that's fine, just acknowledge the fact and bring your awareness patiently back to the exercise you're doing.

Step Two: Grounding Attention in the Breathing

Now gradually narrow your focus of attention on to the sensations of your breathing. Don't try to change your breathing, don't try to stop it from changing, just breathe naturally. Accept what your breathing feels like and make room for it to do whatever it wants, let go of any

desire to change or control it. Notice the sensations of your breathing, the rise and fall of your belly, perhaps movements in your chest, or even your shoulders. Become aware of even the smallest sensations that accompany your breathing, feelings you may not have noticed before. Keep paying attention to your breathing to help ground your attention in the reality of the present moment.

If you're aware of any unpleasant feelings anywhere in your body, just allow yourself to accept them patiently and let them come and go as they please, or to remain the same. Let go completely of any struggle against them and instead study them from a more detached perspective. Combine awareness of the breath with awareness of the body by imagining your breath continually passing right through that part of your body where the unpleasant feelings are happening. Use your breath to centre your attention on that part of your body for a while. As you breathe in and out, continue to actively accept those sensations and allow yourself to fully experience them. Let go completely of any struggle against them. Make room for the feelings to run their course, or come and go freely by imagining a sense of space opening up around them. You are not your breath, you are not those sensations, you are not your emotions or even your thoughts; you're the detached observer of all of these things, viewing experiences from a distance as they come and go without struggle.

Step Three: Expanding Awareness throughout the Body

Now gradually begin to expand your awareness beyond those sensations. Continue to be aware of your breathing and any part of your body that you've been attending to but, in addition, allow your awareness to begin spreading through the rest of your body, throughout the trunk of your body, your arms, your legs, your neck and head. Become aware of your whole body as one, and continue to accept any unpleasant sensations you're experiencing but also begin to notice what else you're experiencing, more and more, progressively widening the sphere of your attention. Not trying to avoid or control unpleasant experiences but rather expanding beyond them.

Now gradually spread your awareness out further beyond your body and into the room around you, where you are and what you're doing right now. Continue to notice how you're using your body and mind as you look slowly around you. As you finish the exercise and begin interacting with the external world and perhaps other people, take that sense of mindfulness and self-awareness with you into your environment and any tasks at hand. If you continue to notice any unpleasant sensations, that's fine, just accept them, let go of any struggle against them, and gently expand your attention beyond them to the world around you and the way you're interacting with life as you move into action.

Elements to consider in guiding (feature iii):

- Guidance on posture – communicate the effect of coming to an upright and dignified posture. If this is not possible (in using the additional 3MBS in difficult situations, for example) then inviting participants to make a first move of becoming aware of their posture is helpful.
- Precision in communicating the 3 steps of the practice during guidance – the instructions need to be carefully targeted towards what is intended.
- Including instructions on mind wandering and working with this.
- Helping participants recognise and practise the three steps of the 3MBS.

N.B. – the 3MBS and other practices need to be accompanied by a teaching process which supports participants in practising at home and integrating the process into their everyday lives. This aspect of the teaching is rated in Domain 5 Conveying course themes through interactive inquiry and didactic teaching

Examples of how this needs to be attended to in relation to the 3MBS are cited below:

- Preparing participants to integrate this into their day – encourage participants to anchor the practice to a specific activity in their day
- It is useful to guide the practice and then afterwards to explain about the three parts – perhaps using the flip chart
- Encouraging participants to use the 3MBS as a natural first step – whenever things feel difficult or there is confusion; using the 3MBS during class when strong emotions have been explored, or there is another need to re-ground in present moment experience, can be a good reminder of this
- Clarity in developing the application of the 3MBS through the 8 weeks

Mindful movement

Key learning (feature ii):

Building on the foundation of the body scan in learning how we can bring awareness to and inhabit bodily experience/sensation Experiencing awareness of the body in motion, as it often is in life Relating to the body with friendliness; for some increasing enjoyment of the body's capacities Movements and postures offer an embodiment of life experiences and processes Seeing habitual tendencies played out Working with physical boundaries/intensity offers a parallel to working in similar ways with emotional experience; experiencing that physical movement can change emotional experience Learning and experiencing working with present moment acceptance, including of our physical limitations, and learning to relate in new ways to pain Learning new ways of taking care of ourselves

Mindful Movement Exercises

When practicing Mindful Movement, you tune into your body, into sensations and movements which you normally tune out because they are so familiar, and get in touch with how wonderful it is to have your body, no matter what it looks or feels like.

One form of Mindful Movement is gentle stretching and strengthening exercise.

This is done very slowly, without striving to change yourself, and without forcing yourself to do more than your body can safely achieve. In this exercise you practice accepting your body as you find it, from one moment to the next, as you stretch, or lift parts of the body, or balance.

This is very different to most exercise classes, which focus only on what the body is doing. In such body-oriented exercise there tends to

be little explicit care given to what is going on in the mind, and how the body and mind affect each other.

Another form of Mindful Movement is Mindful Walking. This involves focusing on the sensations in your feet, or your legs, or maybe feeling your whole body moving. You can notice the tiny movements in the muscles in your feet as they adjust to keep you balanced. You slowly lift one foot off the floor, gently swing it forward, then lower it again, all in slow motion.

Because we tend to live life so unconsciously, we take things like the ability to walk for granted. When you pay attention to it, you will appreciate that it is an amazing balancing act, given the small surface area of the feet. This is the essence of Mindful Movement: learning to notice, appreciate, and enjoy the wonder of the body you have.

Some fun ways that you can help your children to connect mindfully with their body include:

- Practice Mindful Walking with your kids
- Stop & ask them what they noticed in their body when they walked really slowly, & what feelings & thoughts they noticed
- Then walk faster
- Stop & ask them what they noticed in their body this time. Did they notice feelings & thoughts as they walked quickly? Were they different this time?
- Do Mindful Walking again
- Again ask what they noticed in their body when they walked really slowly, & what feelings & thoughts they noticed

There is much to appreciate and enjoy in your body when you meet it mindfully.

Mindful Movement Exercises Text provided by Kara Matheson
http://www.getaheadkids.com.au/Features/2012/20/Mindful%20Movement.html

Elements to consider in guiding (feature iii):

1. Ensuring that participants engage in the practices in ways that are safe and respectful to their body is a major consideration in guiding movement practices

i. Giving clear and precise guidance on ways of working with physical boundaries at the beginning of the practice

ii. Interspersing the practice with reminders about working within safe limits for your body in this moment

iii. Offering guidance in particular on:

a. Potential adaptations for postures as they are taught

b. Reminders to hold postures for the amount of time that is right for each participant regardless of how long the teacher or others hold a posture

c. Reminders that it is OK not to do a posture and either to do something different, or to sit/lie and possibly to visualise the body doing the posture

iv. Always encouraging participants to err on the side of caution

v. Always encouraging participants to listen to the wisdom of their own body and allow this to override any guidance you may be giving

vi. Reminding participants not to be competitive with themselves or others

2. Breath guidance: Helpful guidance regarding the breath includes:

i. Generally, guiding participants to breathe in as they form the intention to move and then to move with the out breath

ii. Encouraging participants to breath fully and freely in whatever way feels most natural as they move

iii. Guidance on relaxing into postures and breathing with or into regions of greatest intensity

3. Ensuring that guidance is given in ways which invite detailed awareness of moment by moment experience

i. Giving plenty of space within the practice:

a. Dwelling in the postures long enough to let go into them

b. Resting between postures to enable the effects of the movement to be sensed

ii. Encouraging participants to explore and discover the creative edge between exploring / investigating / discovering, and accepting / letting be / being with

Domain 5: Conveying course themes through interactive inquiry and didactic teaching

Overview: This domain assesses the process through which the course themes are conveyed to participants. These are at times explicitly drawn out and underlined by the teacher and at other times emerge implicitly within the process. The domain includes inquiry, group dialogue, use of stories and poems, facilitating group exercises, orienting participants to session/course themes, and didactic teaching.

Five key features need to be considered in assessing this domain:

(i) experiential focus – supporting participants to notice and describe the different elements of direct experience and their interaction with each other; teaching themes are consistently linked to this direct experience

(ii) moving around the layers within the inquiry process (direct experience, reflection on direct experience, and linking both to wider learning) with a predominant focus on process rather than content

(iii) conveying learning – through integrating material from outside the group with experience of participants

(iv) teaching skills – the learning is communicated through clear, participatory, playful, alive, responsive teaching process

(v) fluency – teacher conveys ease, familiarity with and confident knowledge of the material

N.B. – Course themes are conveyed through all elements of the course; this domain only covers the teacher's skill during the inquiry process, didactic teaching and facilitation of group exercises (not leading mindfulness practices)

– This domain assesses the process through which the teacher conveys the teaching themes – the presence of the themes themselves is rated in Domain 1 Coverage, pacing and organisation of session curriculum

– Embodiment of mindfulness is a crucial underpinning to interactive teaching and should be assessed under Domain 3 Embodiment of mindfulness

A large part of each session is taken up by interactive teaching processes – reviewing the experience of mindfulness practices during the session and at home (inquiry), drawing out experience during and after group exercises, and offering didactic teaching in an interactive and participatory manner. This exploratory way of approaching experience illuminates the habitual tendencies and patterns of the human mind and offers an embodiment of a potential way of being and working with experience beyond the program. The teacher demonstrates skilful and creative use of a range of different methods of teaching, including the use of metaphor, poems and stories. Participants' difficulties (e.g., avoidance, distress, emotional reactivity) in sessions are crucial opportunities to convey course themes, and the way the teacher works in these moments should be given weight in assessing overall, and in this domain in particular.

(i) experiential focus – supporting participants to notice and describe the different elements of direct experience and their interaction with each other; teaching themes are consistently linked to this direct experience

The teaching process is predominantly based on an experiential focus and supports participants in reconnecting with their direct experience (with a particular emphasis on sensations in the body) and uses this experiential 'data' as a starting point for exploration and learning. When the dialogue moves into conceptualisations, the teacher quickly leads the participants back towards connection with immediate experience. Participants are given opportunities to become aware of

and discriminate the different elements of direct experience – sensations, thoughts, feelings – both retrospectively tracking these as they arose in a mindfulness practice and tracking them now as they arise in the moment.

Style of questioning/dialoguing in mindfulness-based teaching includes:

- Use of open questions, rather than closed questions which only require a "yes" or "no" answer
- Questions/statements that open space – "would you be willing to tell me more?"; 'hows?' and 'whats?' rather than 'whys?'
- Avoiding questions/statements that close/fill the space – e.g. yes/no, fixing/solutions, self stories
- Attentive and positive non-verbals
- Alternating questions and statements
- Opening the space – creating and recognising possibilities
- Sensing when inquiry is appropriate in group discussions – sometimes a question needs an answer, sometimes inquiry, sometimes nothing but 'thank you' or a smile
- Humility – the other person is the expert in their own experience (Blacker, Stahl & Meleo-Meyer, 2006)

(ii) exploring the different layers within the inquiry process (direct experience, reflection on direct experience, and linking both to wider learning) with a predominant focus on process rather than content

How much time is allowed for the actuality of experience and relationship with experience to be explored before introducing broader teaching themes?

One can think of the dialogue as having three concentric circles and layers of inquiry (see Figure):

1. Layer 1 – noticing sensations, thoughts, feelings (direct experience within self)

Areas of exploration/questioning include:

- What did you notice? (e.g. physical sensations, including sounds, feelings, colours, textures, movement)
- How did it feel?
- Where were these occurring – specific location or through the whole body?
- Did the sensations change or were they constant?
- Emotions/feelings, and thoughts connected to them
- Thoughts about now, the past, the future?
- When your mind wandered where did it go?
- Thoughts? – Memories, worries, planning, time, food?
- Sensations? – Restlessness, pain, hot/cold, heavy/light
- Emotions? – Sad, angry, fearful, happy, secure, loving

2. Layer 2 – dialoguing about them (placing the direct noticing in a personal context of understanding) e.g.:

- How did you feel when your mind wandered?
- What did you do when your mind wandered (let it wander, get involved in the thoughts, bring it back – with gentleness, firmness, guilt, annoyance, amusement, judgement, etc.)
- Explore the sensations of reactions/responses – what were the sensations of e.g. gentleness, guilt, pushing away, holding on, tuning out, opening to, etc?
- How did bringing awareness to this experience affect it?
- Is this pattern of experience that you describe familiar? – in what ways?

3. Layer 3 – linking them to the aims of the program (placing the learning in layers 1 and 2 in a wider context of understanding)

Within MBSR this linkage process is in relation to the broad application of mindfulness skills to the areas of living life, managing stress, communicating, making choices about self care, and so on. The encouragement is for participants themselves to come naturally to a process of making the links by applying the learning from the program to their lives; this is done through integrating the mindfulness-based learning material offered in the program into their daily lives. This is true also in MBCT, but there is a greater emphasis within the linkage process on connecting direct experience and learning with an understanding of the particular vulnerability which the program is adapted for – e.g. relapse prevention in depression, chronic fatigue etc. This process is held mainly by the teacher who supports participants in integrating their direct experience with contextual understanding about the particular challenge they are working with.

So linkage is helping participants to illuminate their seeing of:

- The ways in which their mind becomes 'caught' or stuck through their particular way of relating to experience
- The ways in which their learning about mindfulness has relevance within the various spheres of their life
- The ways in which their learning about mindfulness has relevance to the particular vulnerability that they are working with (e.g. susceptibility to depression, chronic fatigue etc.) (see Chapter 12, Inquiry, in Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2012 on how to do this while staying close to participants' direct experience).

In any inquiry process it is important that the teacher takes time with each 'circle', and if the group rushes to discuss or 'talk about', to allow time for participants to come back to simply describing what they noticed. There is no need to stick rigidly to a certain

'progression' through the inquiry; better to see the 'circles' as a map for the teacher.

(iii) teaching of themes conveys understanding of underpinning theoretical principles

Jung's well known quote is apt here – "Learn your theories as well as you can, but put them aside when you touch the miracle of the living soul" (Contributions to Analytical Psychology, 1928). The mindfulness-based teaching process is designed generally to convey the themes implicitly (through an experiential process of personal discovery) rather than explicitly (through a conceptual process of understanding principles and rationales). The challenge for the mindfulness-based teacher is to know the underpinning theoretical principles thoroughly so that they can inform direction and emphasis within this implicit teaching process, and so that they are readily available for occasional moments of brief didactic teaching.

The majority of the material for exploration within the group is generated by the participants rather than by the teacher – but it is also the teacher's responsibility to bring in carefully chosen material to inform and add context and understanding to the processes that are under exploration.

(iv) teaching skills – teaching is concise, clear, participatory, playful, alive, responsive, and makes skilful use of teaching aids

- Concise and clear – the teaching crystallises key processes in an accessible manner.
- Participatory – the teaching process draws on all ways in which human beings experience – thinking, sensing and feeling – and aims to engage all these elements within participants during the teaching.
- Didactic teaching is based on material drawn from direct experience; experience of participants is invited in relation to material offered. As much material as possible is drawn out of the

direct experience of the group, so that any didactic material is 'woven' from lived experience – the teacher collaborates with participants to link direct observations of experience to learning relevant to the participant and to the aims of the program. When teaching didactically the teaching is brief and clear, engages all elements of experiencing (thinking, sensing and feeling) and encourages interactive responses from participants' own experience.

- Playful, alive and responsive – the teaching is engaging and inspiring; the participants and the teacher are mutually engaged in a creative exploration of the material; it is a highly 'in the moment process' – the teacher is responsive to the material as it arises in the moment rather than working from a plan or script; the teacher supports participants in navigating towards dimensions of the material which are highly relevant to the immediacy of participants' experience; the teacher shows skill in deflecting participants from getting stuck in their stories, and instead keeps the focus on immediate experience.
- Use of teaching aids – teacher makes skilful and appropriate use of flip chart or other teaching aids (the provision of appropriate teaching aids is assessed in Domain 1 Coverage, pacing and organisation of session curriculum; the use of these aids is assessed here). The teacher integrates direct experiential teaching with teaching drawn from other sources e.g., stories, poetry and quotations, which point to other ways of experiencing.

(v) fluency – teacher conveys ease, familiarity with and confident knowledge of the material

- Ease – the teacher is clearly at home within the material.
- Familiarity with the material – the teacher clearly knows what they are teaching, and is able to move around flexibly within its territory.

- Confidence in the teaching process – the teacher conveys their knowledge and experience and so inspires confidence in the process of the teaching.

Domain 6: Holding the group learning environment

Overview: The whole teaching process takes place within the context of a group, which if facilitated effectively becomes a vehicle for connecting participants with the universality of the processes being explored. The teacher creates a 'container' or learning environment that 'holds' the group and within which the teaching can effectively take place. The teacher works responsively with group process through bringing an appropriate leadership style to the teaching; through taking good care of managing group safety, trust and boundary issues; through employing a teaching style which takes account of the individual within the context of the group, and balances the needs of both; through using the group process to draw out universal learning themes; through working with and responding to group development processes by managing the various phases of group formation, development and ending. The teacher is able to 'tune into', connect with, and respond appropriately to shifts and changes in group mood and characteristics.

Four key features need to be considered in assessing this domain:

(i) learning container – creating and sustaining a rich learning environment made safe through careful management of issues such as ground rules, boundaries and confidentiality, but which is simultaneously a place in which participants can explore and take risks

(ii)group development – clear management of group development processes over the 8 weeks – in particular management of beginnings, challenges from within the group and endings

(iii)common humanity – moving from personal to universal learning – the teacher consistently opens the learning process towards connection with the universality of the processes under exploration

(iv)leadership style which offers sustained 'holding', demonstrating authority and potency without imposing the teacher's views on participants.

2. The Mindfulness Program Agenda

What follows is the Mindfulness Program Agenda developed for the Deora Project:

Week One: "Bring it on"

Agenda:

- Introduce members to one another
- Establish ground rules and deal with any specific concerns members have
- Identify each person's goals and expectations
- Introduce idea of the mind being on autopilot and the dangers inherent in living that way
- Raisin experiment
- Short breathing exercise
- Feedback and Homework
- Distribute guided meditation CD's and handouts

Table 1: Examples of Goals articulated by group members:

"To learn to focus on things, to concentrate and relax and focus on one thing."

"I want to be more aware of where my head's going. Just to be where I am."

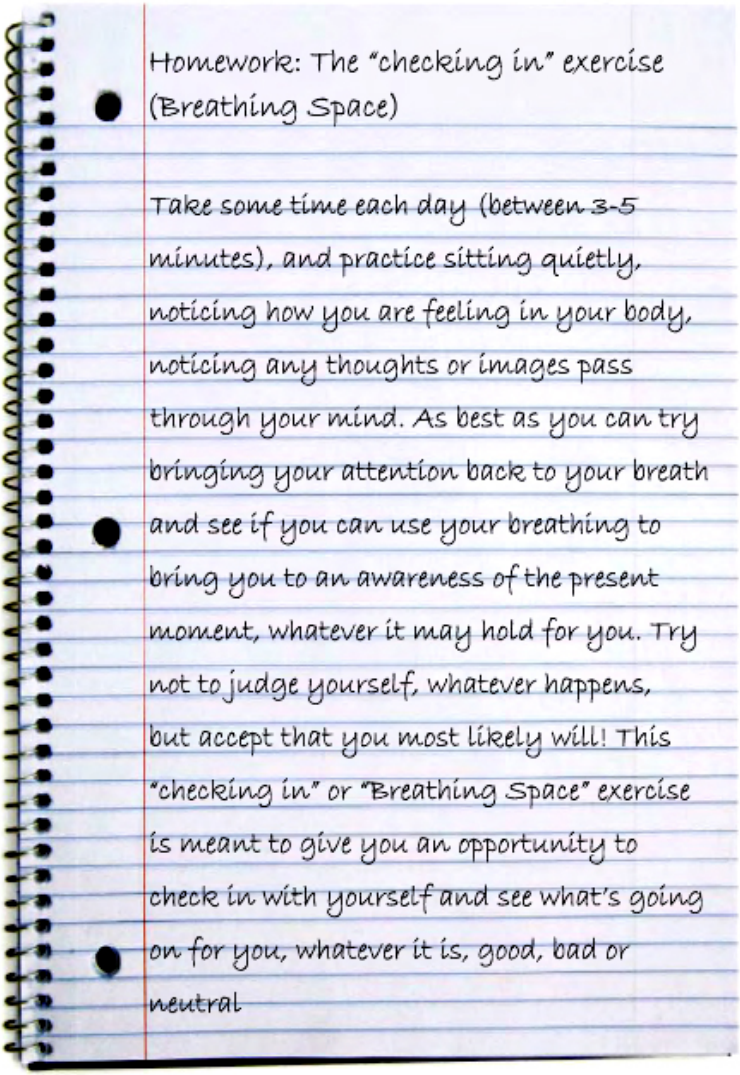
"I want a miracle – to be able to control my own mind more often, to be able to tap into myself, to be able to change my mind"

"To be less anxious, not to fear negative thoughts and run away from negative thoughts…"

"I just want to able to concentrate, to be able to appreciate the good stuff in my life – I have so much but I have no respect for it."

"To be able to be present in any situation and to live life to the full."

"To get to know myself on a deeper level."


Homework: The "checking in" exercise (Breathing Space)
Take some time each day (between 3-5 minutes), and practice sitting quietly, noticing how you are feeling in your body, noticing any thoughts or images pass through your mind. As best as you can try bringing your attention back to your breath and see if you can use your breathing to bring you to an awareness of the present moment, whatever it may hold for you. Try not to judge yourself, whatever happens, but accept that you most likely will! This "checking in" or "Breathing Space" exercise is meant to give you an opportunity to check in with yourself and see what's going on for you, whatever it is, good, bad or neutral

Week 1

Our primary purpose in the first week of the program was to enable members of the group to experience that they were a unique group, embarking on project that had never been tried before in a setting like Deora and to give them some idea about how were we going to behave as a group over the next nine weeks.

We felt it would be important

1. to hear from each person regarding their expectation, goals, concerns or misgivings,
2. to establish the usual ground rules to ensure this group respected the need for safety and confidentiality among its members.
3. we wanted them to have one or two actual experiences of practicing mindfulness, and give them the opportunity to reflect and give feedback on the experience.
4. We also assigned homework to encourage participants to begin to take their practice home, and into their daily lives.

Thirteen people showed up in addition to the mindfulness team. The members were quiet and clearly a little tense in the opening stages of the group.

1. Goals

As they articulated their personal goals, we were struck by how aware they were of the need to steady their minds and become more grounded in the present moment. It was as though the case for mindfulness had already been made before we ever got around to introducing the concept.

Members described how they mostly felt very out of touch with themselves, noticed how their minds wandered a lot and how hard it

was for them to simply be in the present: As one member put it "I want to be more aware of where my head's going. Just to be where I am."

Many also reported feeling anxious, driven, unable to relax. This made it hard for them to be present to people they cared about and to whom they wanted to learn to be more present: " I want to be present when I'm doing things with my sons".

Others hoped that this course would help them be more at ease with themselves, "To learn to relax a bit, I'm very driven as a person", "to get to know my feelings, to be comfortable in myself".

2. Ground rules

In terms of ground rules for the group, we clearly agreed that it should be a safe place for its members and that whatever was said would never be repeated outside of the group in any way that might identify a particular member.

Concern was expressed by some members that they might cry. This was discussed and it was accepted that it was a real possibility for many of them, and that it could be a very positive and important experience.

The team discussed writing notes during the group on group process and publishing an account of the group when it was over, along with some kind of formal evaluation of its impact on the members.

It was important to achieve a clear understanding about the research aspect of this pilot in MBRP and to be given permission by the group (also signed earlier by each of them) to report on the experience to the Deora staff team, and to others working in similar drug projects. All reporting would be done in a completely anonymous manner and no personal details would be disclosed to anyone outside the group program.

3. Practicing Mindfulness and Feedback

Mindfulness was introduced using the well documented "Raisin Experiment" (See Segal et al, 2002).

A small chocolate mini egg was used on this occasion instead of a raisin, due to lack of availability of raisins. The basic idea was that an individual egg was placed in the palm of each member's hand and they would imagine they had never seen one before and get to know it as an entirely new experience, using each of their five senses and giving it their full concentration. This is always a fun way to give people an actual experience of focusing their full attention on an object, in the present moment, and experiencing what can happen when we let go of preconceptions about reality and make contact with old familiar realities in a new, fresh way.

An important component of mindfulness training is the opportunity for each group member to reflect on whatever experience they had whilst engaged in any given exercise. Feedback was encouraged, and whatever happened for someone (there was no such thing as a 'good' or 'bad' experience) was valued as important. Some people really got into the exercise - "It was like a form of meditation – I was there, just looking at it – in the present". Others found they became distracted very easily - "I was daydreaming."

All reactions were equally valuable and revealing, and the exercise helped to bring into focus some of the issues that mindfulness would be addressing as the course proceeded, e.g. difficulty with concentration, the mind's tendency to wander, and problems created by harsh self attacking thoughts.

To conclude this first session, one of the facilitators (Clive) guided the group in a short breathing exercise, to focus on the breath and observe whatever was happening with an attitude of curiosity and acceptance. As one member of the group later described the

experience, this was like looking at whatever you were feeling and saying "Bring it on". Rather than trying to change their feelings or get rid of some unpleasant thought, we asked them to "let themselves be" and notice how they felt in their bodies.

Feedback:

The reactions were mixed: from "It reminded me of Mrs. Dalloway – I could hear the clock tick, the dog bark and the distant wave. All was well" to "I just switched off, thought of the sea".

One person's reaction to this exercise came as something of a surprise: "It's like something came over me, I couldn't even hear you (Clive) after a few minutes; it was mad, like a lightness… it was a bit scary. It was like I was really relaxed but for a split second or two this kind of lightness came over me. I got a fright, thought I'd snap myself out of it".

We encouraged her to adopt a kindly but curious attitude to her experience. And to notice what happened within her when she shared this experience with others in the room. She regained a full sense of being grounded within minutes, but it was suggested that we should begin with very short breathing exercises and check in frequently with participants.

Post-group analysis:

In our post-group analysis, the facilitation team felt that perhaps more formal breathing exercises should be introduced later in the program, and that the early sessions should maintain a focus on helping people – through body scan exercise, mindful stretching and yoga – to reconnect with their bodily experiences and become firmly grounded.

Week Two: "Just because we're addicts it doesn't make us any different"

Agenda:

- Any feedback / comments on session 1
- Review individual experiences with homework assignment
- Brief breathing exercise
- Introduce and complete full Body Scan (BS) - using John Kabat-Zinn CD
- Discuss each person's experience of BS
- Distribute body scan CD's and handouts
- Set homework

Table 2: Sample of reactions to the first exposure of the Body Scan exercise

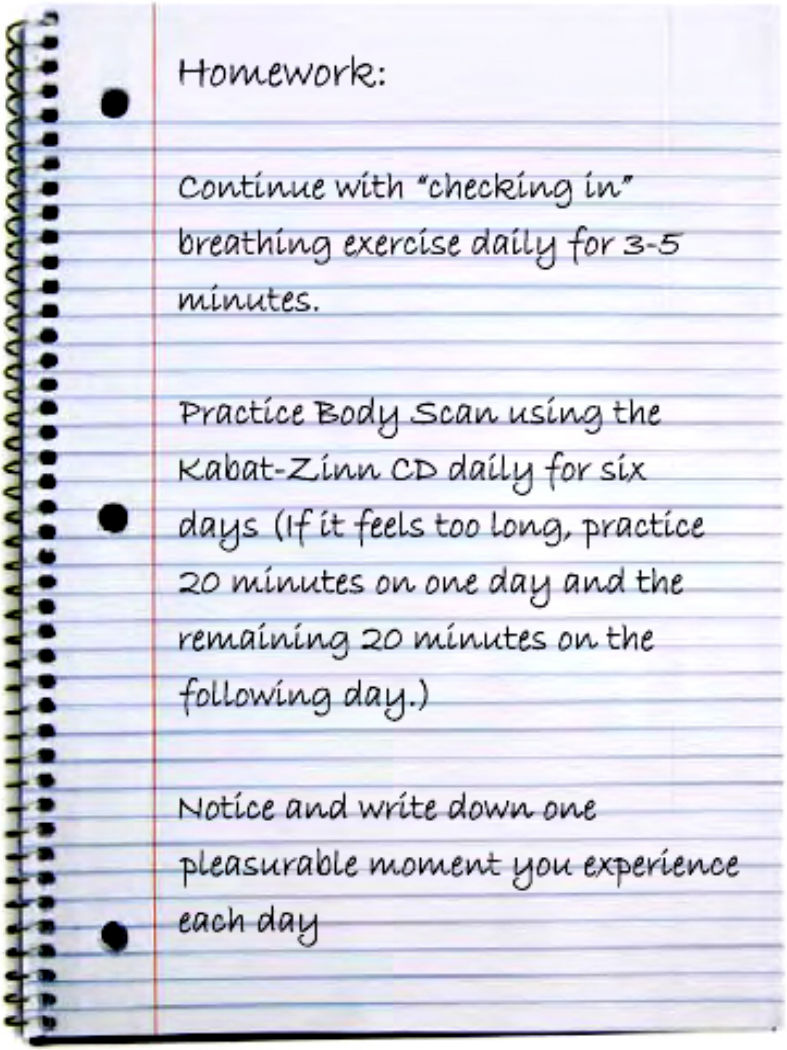
"I drifted in and out of it, but would come back and bring my thoughts back to it."

"I realised how out of touch I am with my body – I had to move my toes to get it. I found him (JKZ) very slow."

"I kept drifting off."

"The tape was annoying, I wanted to throw it out the window."

"I was aware of pain in my body, tired, I was trying to bring my attention back to the tape – it was there anyway (the pain). I wanted to leave the room, I didn't know why."


Homework:
Continue with "checking in" breathing exercise daily for 3-5 minutes.
Practice Body Scan using the Kabat-Zinn CD daily for six days (If it feels too long, practice 20 minutes on one day and the remaining 20 minutes on the following day.)
Notice and write down one pleasurable moment you experience each day

Week 2

Reactions to the first meeting were generally positive, but some people were disappointed as they hoped that this course might provide a simpler, faster solution to their emotional distress. One lady, who subsequently reported finding great benefit in the course overall, commented "Last week I was disappointed, I wanted something life-changing, quick!".

Group members were very vocal about their positive and negative experiences of attempting a brief mindfulness - "checking in exercise" during the past week. There were several reports of finding it hard to make time - "I struggled just giving it time, to give it to myself is very hard, I can do it here", "I was doing it, but only for a few minutes on the bus or something". One person noticed how distressed his thoughts were – "My head was mental, I was having insane thoughts", and another picked up on how judgemental he was being with himself – "It's good, I get calm, but by the time I get to the hall door it's gone, then I start beating myself up for not being able to do it".

It was important to hear a wide range of reactions and it was important that the team accepted them all with equanimity - to react calmly to each one, without appearing to be selectively favouring some and discouraging others. The challenge for the team was to model a "mindful" response to whatever experiences people were having, so that the group could gradually recognise that this was what we meant by being non-judgemental.

Body scan exercise:

TB used stick drawings to illustrate how the mind can very often be in a different time zone to the body and asked group members to reflect on their own experiences of being "disconnected". He then asked the group what it was like to live like this (given that we all do so much of the time). One person responded "It's not living, you're

not present". It was agreed by everyone present that being out of touch with one's body and feelings was a major risk for someone in recovery as tensions and urges could creep up on you unawares and get the better of you. The idea of taking some time daily to check in systematically with your body and "stay in touch with it" became the rationale for the Body Scan exercise, which is simply a slowed down body awareness exercise, where attention is brought very systematically to each part of one's body.

As one of the participants described in the follow-up interviews, addiction brings with it a fundamental mind-body disconnection, mindfulness allowed her to confront this in a gentle way: "I walked around for 2 years with a shoulder that was out when I was addicted…. I did register the pain, got migraines etc., I felt it severely, but I was still running from it, wouldn't confront it."

A recording of John Kabat-Zinn's (JKZ) guided body scan exercise was used because the team had purchased copies of this CD for each person to practice at home, and it was felt that they should be introduced to it within the formal program.

Feedback:

Reactions to the Body Scan exercise were mixed, but with more people responding unfavourably than favourably. Table 2 gives a sample of some of these reactions.

Some group members wanted JKZ to move a lot faster. Some realised that the reason the body scan is slow is that it is as much training for your mind to remain focused as any other meditation exercise. And that it takes time to feel what's happening in your body when you've been out of touch with it for a long time. And someone else did report how she had arrived in a negative mood, not knowing why, only to realise through the body scan that she was extremely angry: "I was very angry within myself when I came in… in a rage actually. By doing the BS I felt like I was able to be in my body

more". Another member spoke of becoming aware of a stiffness in her neck, she hadn't previously noticed.

Those who had found the CD unhelpful now began to wonder if the whole course was designed "by-Americans-for-Americans" and voiced their concern that maybe none of it would work for them, particularly with their complex history of drug abuse. But one man challenged this view and pointed out that "just because we're addicts it doesn't make us any different". He added: "I feel quite honoured to be part of this. I didn't always feel like that. I just thought I was there to line the counsellors' pockets. Now I'm opening my mind. Before I'd rebel, but all I ever did was rob myself of opportunities like this one".

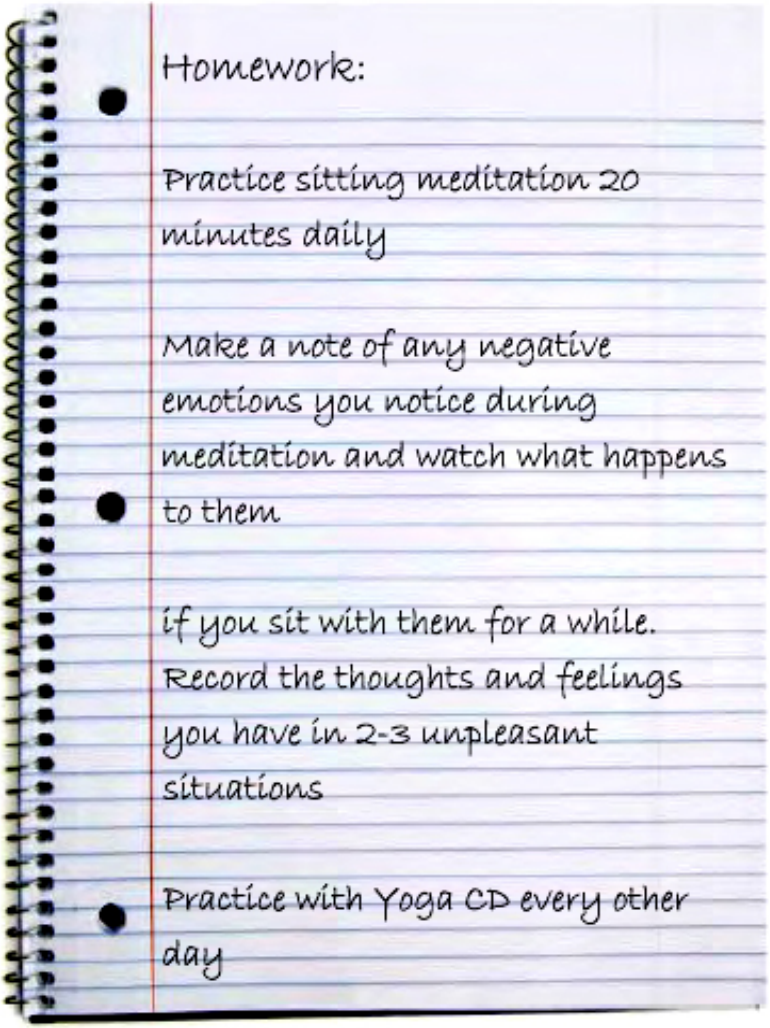
Post-group team reflection:

It was felt that the group had been much more engaged and "real" in this session and that the message had gotten through that mindfulness was not magic and that it required some degree of work. There had been a moment when TB responded a little too defensively to one comment that the group were all guinea pigs. Again a key theme in running mindfulness groups is to be able to take whatever arises and respond in a curious but somewhat neutral way. It was agreed by all the team that producing our own, somewhat briefer, body scan exercise would make this key ingredient of mindfulness training much more accessible. For the time being, we would provide them with copies of Mark Williams' body scan CD next week.

Week three: Mindfulness creates a space where you can hold your life in awareness and see what you need to do

Agenda:

- Review homework
- Introduce and practice Yoga
- Reflect on experience of doing yoga
- Automatic thinking and how it influences our mood and behaviour
- Mindful awareness of automatic thinking and how it enables change
- Mindful sitting exercise (20 min)
- Feedback and homework
- Distribute CD's and handouts


Homework:
Practice sitting meditation 20 minutes daily
Make a note of any negative emotions you notice during meditation and watch what happens to them
if you sit with them for a while. Record the thoughts and feelings you have in 2-3 unpleasant situations
Practice with Yoga CD every other day

Week 3

Today the group started with a very lively discussion of homework, captured perfectly in one report "When I came out last week I didn't want to do the homework but I knew I had to. The first night I didn't do it, I was beating myself up for it. The second night I came in late, the CD (body scan) didn't work. I felt great!"

The other exercise – record pleasurable moments in the day – had captured everyone's imagination and seemed to work very well.

- "I did do the pleasurable moments – there were things in that. I went to the aqua centre. The inner child is there but the macho head is pulling it back. I rang my family, I'm happy for them but also that I'm not there. I allowed my inner child to come out"
- "Writing the positive events down was great, to remember them, cause I'm not good at remembering that and you're reliving it as you write it down. When it's happening I don't really stop and enjoy it (the moment)… I skate over it. Now I stopped, was aware of it all. It was a very powerful thing to do"
- "It was in my head during the day – journaling the pleasurable moments – so in some ways I had an antenna for it".
- "I did the 'moments homework' – I had more sad moments but that's probably just where I was at."
- "I did some meditation during the week. I found it very hard. I love coming here 'cause I can't give myself the time. Coming here, realizing the amount of tension in my body… there's a lot of indecision in my head, change in my life, big decisions to make."
- "Some days it was great, others I had my eye on the clock…it was an irrational agitation. The bottom line is that sometimes I find it hard to sit with myself. I want to escape. I was watching all sorts of crap on telly. There are days I don't even want to entertain the thought of being with myself. I knew that's exactly what was going on".

Yoga

Orla introduced yoga exercises and spoke about their value in helping us connect with our bodies and use this to ground ourselves in the present moment.

She took the group through a range of Hatha yoga exercises that involved standing and lying down.

She brought people through the exercises at a fairly swift pace and this appealed a lot to the group. When we reviewed their experiences afterwards, it became even clearer that the yoga had engaged their attention completely and that it had made them very aware of their breathing and bodily experience.

- "I was concentrating fully on the exercises"
- "I noticed I was weaker on the left side"
- "When you focus on breathing, inhale into it, you can go more. I stopped using my brain, just breathed through it."
- "I really enjoyed it. It's better than the gym. I had been doing Reiki but the teacher was 'getting in contact with the spiritual world' so I said stop!"
- "The last breathing exercise we did was the first time that I've ever stayed with meditation. Last week I was thinking about sea gulls, I was in space. Why? Suppose I'm doing a lot of surrender in my life at the moment. Yoga took my mind off why I was here, but doing it mindfully helped… yeah, that helped. It's starting to come together for me"

Awareness of Automatic Thoughts exercise

To introduce automatic negative thoughts and their power in shaping our perceptions of the world and how we react to everyday events, we had the group imagine the following scenario:

You are walking down the street and someone from a program you'd attended walks towards you on the other side of the street. You are happy too see this person and you had a good relationship with them when you both went through the program together. As they walk towards you, they appear to be looking in your direction, but they keep walking on and don't acknowledge in any way that they see you.

After listening to this scenario, each person was invited to write down whatever thoughts had passed through their minds as they imagined themselves in that situation. Also to note down any feelings they may have had. This exercise demonstrated how rapidly or "automatically" we make interpretations of routine everyday events (mostly without ever being aware that we are doing this) and how our emotional reactions are powerfully affected by the interpretations we make. The group mostly jumped to very negative conclusions and felt badly within themselves that the person across the street had chosen to ignore them. Their thoughts "seemed true" but as they each shared their experience of this exercise, they group began to realise that in any given situation, many interpretations are possible:

- "If someone gives you a compliment you can be embarrassed, angry, happy. The key is your interpretation, not the stimulus"
- "You don't call out to them either (the person ignoring you), you don't check reality, I suppose it's a self-obsession thing"
- "It's funny, if it happens to someone else I can see it's irrational, I like to think that I'm more impartial, that I have distance, perspective"

The value of mindfulness in helping to become aware of our automatic thoughts was discussed. If we could somehow catch ourselves as we were becoming pulled into some familiar negative interpretation of an event, we might be able to pause and change how we react, instead of being pulled into some self-defeating behaviour that may start us down the slippery slope to relapse.

The really dangerous space to get into is where you just react in the absence of any awareness. When we react without thinking, it's generally because our feelings are pretty strong and we have little time or capacity to think about what we're about to do, and whether we really want to act in a particular way.

Mindfulness introduces a pause between the stimulus and the response; it creates a space where we can look at what's happening and make choices. We may choose to act in the same old way we always have, but we may also choose to act in a different way and see what happens. It's up to me, but at least this time I am making a free choice.

This same principle applies when painful or difficult memories are triggered and we react against them and act in a destructive way towards them. Mindfulness gives us the capacity to see what's going on and to hold our distress in awareness, until it begins to ease and transform. Mindfulness buys us time and helps prevent us from making the same old mistakes over and over. Mindfulness also has power to transform negative emotions, not by pushing them away but holding them gently in awareness, like we would a child in distress.

The session ended with a brief sitting meditation, after which Clive read a poem by Rumi to settle everyone down before the group left the session.

Post session team analysis:

This session made the team much more aware that this is a group of people that carry a lot of inner tension and trauma. Many have had experiences that they would prefer not to remember. Many have a great deal of chaos in their lives, in terms of where they physically live, economic pressures and stresses emanating from within their extended families. For some, the desire to run away is very strong, an understandable in many ways. Any kind of self-awareness training with a group like this has to be carefully paced and carried out in

tandem with skills teaching to deal with the realities in their lives that are severely challenging.

On reflection, the authors would recommend that in future courses, trainers take more time to emphasise the importance of participants accessing additional support to cope with whatever comes up during the course. This was in fact suggested by one of the participants in the follow-up interviews.

The issue of non-attendance by some members was raised. Although there were a few apologies, it was clear that others who had begun the program may well have chosen to drop out. This needed to be raised in the group rather than avoided, in some vain hope that they might show up in future sessions.

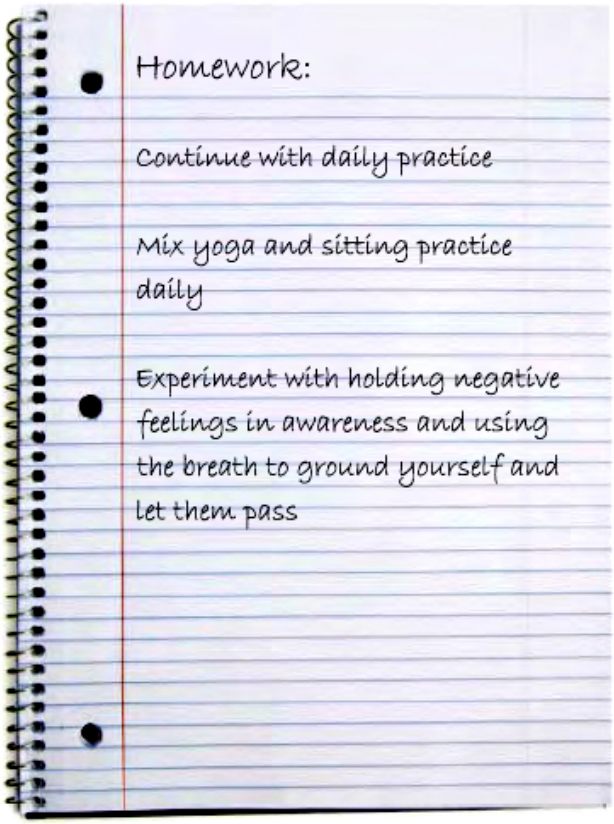
Generally the team felt the group were achieving a genuine sense of cohesion. Many comments were made between the group members themselves, and many reflected a tremendous capacity for empathy between themselves. One or two members were "burning to tell their story" but the team felt that we should be careful not to let one individual say too much in case his trust level in the group was not quite up to his appetite for self-disclosure. It was suggested that perhaps he could have some time with his own therapist in a one to one this particular week, so that he could ventilate freely and safely.

Movement exercise at the beginning and sitting quietly at the end seemed to work very well in this session.

Week four: "Cradling your cravings"

Agenda:

- Review and discuss homework /personal practice
- Yoga (30 min)
- Being aware and coping with urges / cravings
- Assign homework
- Distribute Pema Chodron CD's and handouts



Week 4

When this session began, it was evident that energy was very low. It may have been perhaps because only six people turned up. It also became clear from their discussion of experiences with homework – recognising and writing down their thoughts and feelings in "unpleasant situations" (what also became clear from this? Maybe it's just the phrasing here, but I don't get the point…).

Members described some objectively difficult situations and how being aware of their reactions had helped them to cope (or not).
"My unpleasantness was over a funeral… there's nothing more unpleasant than that – there was regret, anger, sadness, pacing back and forward and all that… like I didn't know what to do"

We explored this further with him and his notes showed that he felt "angry (100%), regret (60-70%)".

Noticing he felt that way and allowing himself to be upset had helped him to get through it without doing anything self-destructive.

Death, anniversaries, feelings of loss and guilt were very common experiences recorded by the group. There was a keen sense in the room that recovery for each of them was a "life or death" matter. And if mindfulness could help them stay alive, they wanted to give it every chance.

"The way I look at it, once I stay clean they didn't die in vain… Even now, I don't call them by their names cause that gets closer to the emotions… I'd do anything to recover – for me it's even recover or die – I've already relapsed twice…"

While some of the participants found the homework difficult, the positive impact that this simple journaling exercise had on some participants came through in the follow-up interviews. As one participant stated:

"It (the course) got me to recognise that my feelings, good and bad, pass. Like the homework exercise, when we had to write down good and bad feelings and how they pass was great. The good ones made me laugh, the bad ones were hard… noticing the bad feelings passed made me feel guilty that I wasn't feeling good all the time. The homework helped me deal with it, accept it, 'I can't do anything about it'"

The main issue for discussion in this session was how to recognise and cope with urges and cravings. Many of them were confused about this idea of being present and accepting one's feelings and cravings, versus giving into them.

One man captured the idea of being "mindfully aware" of urges and craving pretty well: "It's like, when you get a craving, to accept them and go through it rather than running away from them and turning to something else, cause then it would just come back worse. When it hits me, I just go through it, the cravings will only last 3 or 4 minutes, a cigarette only lasts 3 or 4 minutes, and then it's only one, then the next time I'd beat myself up and before the craving even comes I'll give in. Mindfulness makes you aware that they are only feelings, not more sinister, even though it feels that way sometimes".

Another person described how she was overcome with anger after an unpleasant encounter with a city official. Her day had started out very well, as she had the insight during her practice that we "make up our realities". She had found this idea very liberating and felt that she'd finally "got what mindfulness was about". However, after her frustrating encounter she "completely lost it". She described feeling sorry for herself and becoming carried away with a "story in my head" that she would always be miserable. And then the thought hit her: "wouldn't it be great to get drunk!" She described how she "cradled this feeling" for a long time before deciding to do something constructive, which seemed to "break the spell". This led to a very important discussion about how people reacted to urges and cravings.

A member responded to the above account with the observation that she wasn't so much cradling the feeling as "linking arms with it, going down the road with it, not holding it."

One of the team summed up the message we were giving as "it's holding something still rather than letting the puppy take you for a walk". This message wasn't completely clear and some people felt confused.

Once again, clarity came from within the group itself. The challenge as somebody described is "to find your way back after you've been taken for a ride". And someone else added: "It's about stopping, if you go with it it's like a snowball. It gets bigger and sucks everything in its path. For years I felt lonely, I was hurting…. It's to hold it, to accept it. At home I get a belt of 'you're lonely' or 'you're an eejit'… it's about getting up off the chair… if it hurts feel the hurt: Is it just in my heart or is it in my legs or my body? It's to feel the pain, not to jump up and run away. At the beginning I thought they were all off their heads (when they told me to 'feel the pain), I thought 'I've been feeling it for years!' but then I stopped. I felt the pain. It was everywhere. In my heart, my head my legs… now it hasn't come back for a long time. For years I had been making my problems bigger and bigger and the pain was getting bigger and bigger".

Yoga followed and the energy within the group rose steadily. Session ended with a very quiet and deep sitting practice. Increasingly there is less need to provide guided instructions for mindful meditation and people have become very comfortable with silence.

Post session analysis:

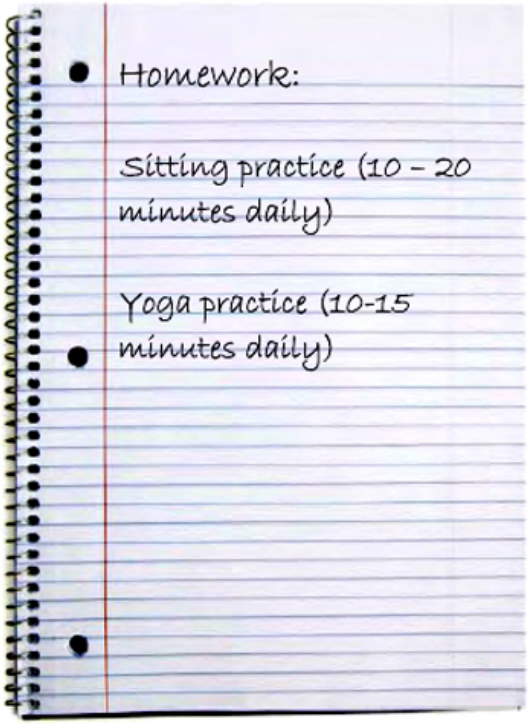
The team felt we needed to make sure to remove extra chairs when members fail to show up. This allows people to sit more closely together and helps build cohesion. Given that it became obvious very early on in the group that their energy was low, it might have been wiser to abandon the agenda momentarily and ask the group what

that was about. We might also have extended to them the option of doing the yoga before getting into the difficult territory of strong negative emotions. The whole issue of coping with strong emotions needs further clarification. Also some practical skills for coping with cravings and urges would have added a lot today.

Week five: "emotions are messengers"

Agenda:

- Discuss missing people and how that feels for those present
- Review homework and experiences with personal practice
- Yoga practice
- Discuss emotions: what they can teach us about ourselves and how to cope with them
- Short talk by invited guest (someone who has used mindfulness successfully to face very difficult challenges in his life)
- Distribute handouts



Week 5

We began today with an invitation to the remaining group members to express how they felt about some people dropping out, or how it felt when other group members had failed to show up and then re-appeared. By and large they appeared un-fussed by people who left or didn't show. Part of that was because of their considerable experience of being on group programs where this happened regularly: "I'm used to it by now, it happens in every group". And partly, their reaction reflected a strong philosophy of looking out for number one and not counting too much on anyone else: "I'm here for myself", "It's about my recovery ultimately, not anyone else", "I try not to depend on people, it's what I've learnt". One member did find that when others dropped out, it undermined her confidence in this program: "I do start to wonder what am I doing here if all these other people are dropping out?"

The group took time to sit a while and get centred before reviewing homework. There was further evidence of people finding it hard to cope with the degree of tension and /or distress they encountered in themselves when they tried to practice.

- "I find it very hard to do meditating, my mind doesn't want me to do it, but I just tell myself 'discipline, discipline, discipline'. I can do about ten minutes but I feel all the tension in my body… I just want to kick out, to clench my hands… I just want to run"
- "I'm the same, I find it very hard to meditate, hard to stay still… I'd be trying to force myself to feel relaxed"

But many self-reports shared among the group spoke of having had some very positive experiences when practicing.

- "I ate my cereal really slow, I noticed all the textures and the tastes. I noticed I was absent – I say 'absent without leave' a lot of the time. A lot of the time when I was driving… my brain was

just somewhere else most of the time… I was trying to be mindful of everyday things"

- "Some days I have wobbly thoughts, but I try to 'let it be' and just come back to my breathing"
- "For the first time in my life I've noticed how nasty I am to myself…"

The major portion of the first half of this session was given over to 25 minutes Yoga, followed by 15 minute sitting meditation (with 1-minute breaks where we checked that people were doing ok)).

Emotions

We discussed emotions as being the body's language for how we were experiencing the world. Emotions were messengers that were trying to alert us to something that was happening between us and the world. We could disregard them or we could 'invite them in' and listen to what they might be alerting us to. Our emotional reactions can be very subjective and therefore do not always correspond accurately with what's happening in the external world, but they do identify very accurately how we are feeling in ourselves and thus they provide us with important information.

They are a more reliable source of information than our automatic thoughts. And they can also be a good radar system, telling us when something in our world isn't quite right.

The problem for most of us is that we're on auto pilot most of the time and we don't even notice what we're feeling until our emotions are so strong that they overwhelm us. Mindfulness teaches us how to come off autopilot and take time to notice painful emotions as they begin to gather force. And as one member pointed out, "if we don't listen, we can end up dead."

We read and discussed Rumi's poem "The Guest House" and I offered to show DVD of Thich Nhat Hahn next week where he

speaks about specific techniques for coping with strong emotions, which sparked a lot of interest within the group.

The Guest House

by Mewlana Jalaluddin Rumi

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
As an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

Invited speaker – Frank

Frank (aged 37 years) had been a member of the St James's Hospital mindfulness training course and follow up support group for the past 5-6years. He had developed a very stable, strong practice which helped him to avoid relapse and hospitalisation since 2000 (he had been hospitalised 27-30 times in the previous 20 years, generally for months at a time, for severe bi-polar disorder) although he had been given many other diagnoses between age 14 and 30). In so many ways his recovery was remarkable and he attributed this primarily to the benefits of mindfulness.

I invited him to speak to the group about his practice and how it got stronger over the years. He did this very well and the group were clearly captivated by his account and impressed by how recovered Frank was now.

Frank added further that just as he got over his "little psychiatric problem", he was told that a nagging pain he had had in his side was pancreatic cancer. He has known this since January 07 and the prognosis is pretty grim. He spoke very openly about this, without any extreme emotion and with a lightness of touch that was sensitive to his listeners. Frank was not someone that would seek to "talk up" his emotions or try to provoke upset in others. Quite the contrary, he spoke simply, didn't labour the point that he was almost certainly facing death, but didn't deny the reality of this and the challenge it was for him emotionally.

The group were very deeply affected by the poignancy of his story and a few shed tears. But they also heard how incredibly helpful mindfulness had been through it all and how, when it came to coping with intense

Post session analysis:

Yoga in the early stage of the group worked very well to settle them down and to bring their energy and attention "up".

Allowing time for extended sitting meditation, where we took 1-minute breaks to check and see how people were doing was felt to have worked very well.

Frank had made a powerful impact on the group and it was agreed that his presence for the remainder of the program - particularly on our away day - would help to galvanise the group and increase their motivation and confidence in the practice.

The teaching on emotion needed longer time and more practical examples and opportunities to practice accepting and allowing feelings to emerge. This is a key challenge for this group and perhaps also for this client population. It needs to be worked out much more precisely next time round.

Week Six: Knowing what sets me off, catching myself before it's too late

Agenda:

- Review homework
- Brief Sitting meditation,
- Yoga (30 minutes)
- Identifying relapse triggers
- Play and discuss "Dealing with emotional storms DVD (40 min)
- Distribute "Emotional storms" CD and handouts

Table 3: Relapse signatures described by group members

"I stop meditating… I'm not aware… I'm mindless instead of mindful"

"I go to bed and don't keep in touch with anyone"

"The lies my brain tells me, the addiction tells me…'one is just going to be enough'"

"I see people lying out in the garden or buying garden furniture and I fucking hate them... I want that… fucking frustration… of not being able to move, of being stuck there… fuck this, I might as well go for a drink…."

"For me it would be frustration at things that have never changed and probably won't ever change. Like my family"

"I had a great four days away, I came home and it was the same thing… nobody there… I felt lonely… I thought 'fuck this', got into bed… then I thought 'why are you getting into bed, you're not tired?' I jumped back out…".

"It can be something small that grows into something big in my head…"

"Yeah, that happened to me on Sunday… I think its memories I'm not aware of, having feelings and I don't know where they're coming from"

"For me it's when I lose a sense of gratitude"

"For me the trigger is becoming my own God, needing no one"

Week 6

We began with sitting meditation. There was very active engagement with this exercise by the group.

Members tuned in very quickly to how they were feeling and shared this openly afterwards. We moved directly into yoga practice, outside in the garden, and returned to group room where people shared any changes they noticed in how they were now feeling. The idea was to give them an experience of the "impermanence of feelings": Feelings come and go; it can be enough to notice them, to acknowledge that whatever I am feeling is simply what I'm feeling, to continue to bring my attention back to the present moment, through focusing on the breath, through engaging in some activity, and to notice how feelings shift and change.

With emotions that are intense and painful, it was also important to learn specific coping techniques. For this reason we would be showing a DVD on "Coping with emotional storms" by Thich Nhat Hahn in the second half of the session.

Identifying key situations, events, that can provoke a relapse into old thinking and behaviour patterns Different situations, events and emotions can set off a chain reaction that leads to relapse. Each person needs to know what sets them off and to take evasive action before it's too late. It is helpful to know one's personal "relapse signature", i.e. those warning signs that tell me I may be moving towards danger.

The above examples revealed a range of behaviours, thoughts and strong feelings (some which appeared to come out of nowhere) that people could identify as important warning signs of possible relapse.

We then tried to develop these insights a bit further by having members draw out their personal "relapse maps", i.e. that chain of thoughts feelings and behaviours that seemed to carry them towards

addictive behaviour, e.g. "Your head starts to go first, you don't use and then go mad. It can be so subtle. I was doing recovery stuff before I relapsed but I was doing it automatically, my heart wasn't in it. I'd actually relapsed before I picked up the drug… you can get the buzz before you even get near the drug… the anticipation and then the hit. I loved it, for a minute, and then the minute went."

Coping with emotional storms:

Watching Thich Nhat Hahn DVD

Thich Nath Hahn is a Zen Buddhist monk whose writings - e.g. "The Miracle of Mindfulness" published in 1972 - have had an enormous impact on the development of structured mindfulness training programs in health care situations. Thus, his approach to mindfulness training is very evident in the Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program for chronic physical diseases developed and taught by John Kabat-Zinn in the USA and also in the Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy program (MBCT) for depression developed by John Teasdale and Mark Williams in the UK. Both these programs now have been scientifically researched and shown to have significant benefits. This DVD on emotional crises is particularly relevant to the needs of this population and describes some very practical methods for using mindfulness to steady ourselves and take care of ourselves when we experience intense emotions that can easily overwhelm us.

This DVD elaborates on a number of very profound ideas, in very simple language, for dealing with strong emotions. Thich Nath Hahn uses very familiar images and metaphors to give people a sense of exactly what's involved in each of the steps he describes.

Strong emotions, he says, can take us by surprise and we should learn to recognise the signs before it is too late. Strong emotions can lead to suicidal behaviour, as some people feel that suicide is the only way they can get free of their strong emotions. Emotions are powerful

energies that arise from our unconscious and if we do not learn to deal with them they can overpower us. We should prepare in advance for emotional storms by learning how to embrace our feelings and emotions. We have to begin to learn how to deal with emotions right now, because when the storm hits, it may be too late. Like the way we prepare for winter; we cut wood in the summer and let it dry so that it can be of use to us when winter comes. It is too late to cut wood in the winter-time. We should not wait until then.

Some of the points made by Thich Nhat Hahn on the DVD about emotional storms:

- Our emotions are only a part of us. We are more than our emotion. We should write on a piece of paper and carry it around "dear emotion, you are only a part of me".
- The challenge is to mobilise other elements in us to take care of the emotion. If you have been practicing mindful breathing, you are prepared to mobilise mindful energy to take care of your painful emotion.
- Our emotion is not our enemy, it is our "baby"; we need to know we can take care of it. By recognising the emotion, embracing the emotion, I can experience relief.
- Our well being in a crisis is like a tree being blown around in a storm. If we look at the upper part of the tree, we see it being blown around, and we may feel it is so fragile and vulnerable. But if we bring our attention to the trunk of the tree, and think about how firmly rooted it is in the soil, we can have a very different feeling. We see that is stable. During the experience of strong emotion, we also should not stay on the level of the head or the heart, we need to bring our attention to our naval, and become aware of our breathing. Lying down, placing our hand on our belly, and breathing deep and slow. We need to hold firm to - "cling to" - our in-breath and out-breath, until the storm passes. What we do meanwhile is to maintain an awareness of our

breathing and keep ourselves firmly grounded in the present moment.

- Emotions are impermanent, they do pass. By surrounding the emotion with mindful awareness, the emotion loses much of its power and energy. When it passes back into our subconscious, it will not be as strong. It has taken a "bath of mindfulness" and next time it comes up it will be a little weaker.
- We have survived emotions before, and each time we do, we grow strong. Each time we experience them and survive, we also grow in our confidence to look after the part of our mind that is capable of feeling intense pain.
- We are afraid of the elements in our unconscious that feel intense fear, despair, anger etc. We are so afraid that we set up blocks within our mind so that these feelings won't arise. We do this without being aware that we are doing it. Every time we sense these feelings might arise, we get busy. We keep our minds occupied so as not to feel whatever we have locked into "mental basements". And we fill our conscious "living rooms" with as much distraction as possible. But of course hidden pain and hurt feelings do arise despite our best efforts to suppress them. In our dreams and sometimes in our waking lives, we are made aware of strong emotions that we carry within us.
- Repression of feelings also sets up a situation of bad circulation between our conscious and our deeper minds. We suffer symptoms, sometimes they are physical, other times repression of our feelings can lead to symptoms of mental illness. The solution is to open the door of our mental basement and allow them arise. But we need to be able to look after them when they do. And this is why we practice mindfulness and build up our capacity to surround and transform painful emotions that are present in us.
- The energy of mindfulness is strengthened by practicing with others and by deepening our understanding of how our mind works. In psychotherapy, we practitioners can bring mindful

energy to others and make it safe for them to bring out painful emotions that they cannot cope with alone.

- During the time that painful emotions are not present, we should take advantage of this to practice mindful walking and mindful sitting. With each in-breath, with each step, we can say "I have arrived" and with each out-breath, each step we can say "I am home". This helps us to develop an easy rhythm and to remind ourselves that we are choosing to arrive in the present moment, rather than keep running away. This is an "act of revolution" because it reverses the way we normally live.

Post-session analysis:

The group feels like its really dealing with fundamental issues of concern to relapse prevention.

We could do a lot on the subject of relapse prevention, maybe having them literally write down the chain of thoughts-feelings-behaviours that lead to relapse, and also a list of actions they could take to pull themselves out of a nose dive. Mindfulness enhances their capacity to be aware when trouble is looming, or to see themselves walking themselves into danger. The DVD described 'internal' coping mechanisms which could help them weather whatever storm hits; there are also probably some practical 'external' coping mechanisms they could employ to avert a relapse.

Week seven: Practice, practice, practice…

Agenda:

- Practice and consolidate all of the exercises the group has been introduced to so far.
- Play CD excerpts (omitted in earlier sessions due to lack of time.)
- Discuss any issues re mindfulness that remain unclear to the group.
- Discuss termination of the program
- Individual recovery plans

Week 7

The group were taken by bus to a meditation centre by the sea where we all spent a day (10am – 4 pm) practicing mindful sitting, mindful walking, Yoga, listening to excerpts from tapes and CDs, eating in silence together, and planning what they each needed to do to support their own continued recovery. The day was marked by a great deal of silence and concentration. I think this is an important day where the emphasis is on the various practices themselves, rather than on teaching, problem-solving and discussion which dominate the weekly sessions.

Because it was important for the team to fully engage in the practices during the entire day, and be present with the others as they also practiced, it was decided not to take notes. No new material, handouts or CDs were introduced on this day. There was a keen awareness among the group that this program was drawing to a close.

Table 4: What made me stop using

"I stopped cause it wasn't what I wanted, I knew there was more to me than what addiction had to offer"

"I drank to feel better and change how I felt about everything. It seemed to work at the start but it stopped working. I was still feeling bad anyway, with or without it."

"For me it was misery and fear of being controlled, it was the slavery"

"I loved taking drugs, the feeling… but I lost the ability to be a human being, to do anything. I knew it was quit or die, so that's what I did…"

"It was like a really messy divorce. I couldn't leave the drugs… I relapsed. I just couldn't keep up, I couldn't take it. I was so desperately unhappy and completely stuck, like walking into the same wall every day… I loved it, loved taking drugs… But I couldn't get enough because reality catches up with you, like the boogey man, snapping at my heels"

"I was beginning to get ashamed of the things I was doing… it's very frightening to be that out of control in what you say and do."

"You start using in gangs but you end up on your own… eventually I said 'fuck this shit, this is not for me'. I always knew it wasn't for me: sitting in a field, talking about robberies… 'I don't belong with these scumbags'… I was ashamed, I could never get away with it… wherever I went, people always saw me… I could never run, I was always caught, it just never happened… I was worth more than the life that drugs had to offer me and that there was more to life"

Table 5: Why I want to stay clean

"The simple little things you appreciate that before you'd never have even noticed. Simple things – like the robin in the garden… the roses starting to bud"

"There's some really good days, really brilliant and exciting, you feel free… like you've just escaped something big…"

"For me being out of addiction is enough. I don't expect to wake up and walk on roses 24/7, it's enough to get up and not need a drug… there's a big world out there for me to see"

"The madness is just too painful. It's isolating, lonely, chaotic, it's just not where I want to be. Now I feel well, connected, like I belong in me, and in the universe in a broader sense."

"At the moment I feel a strong sense of purpose in my life but it hasn't always been there. What I'm doing now is fulfilling me; it's making me whole."

Week eight: Staying clean

Agenda:

- Sitting meditation
- Checking in with our emotions
- Developing a recovery blueprint,
- Review original goals and check whether they had been achieved
- Personal learning from this course
- Supports and resources to strengthen mindfulness practice

Week 8

We began with sitting practice, which the group now do with little or no guidance. Afterwards we checked in with how they were feeling and their reactions were as follows: 'Uneasy', 'brilliant', 'grand', 'chilled', 'anxious', 'relaxed', 'complete'.

Recovery blueprint

We systematically went around each person and had them answer three key questions:

1. What made you stop using?
2. What's making you stay clean?
3. What have you learned in this course to help you in recovery?

Tables 4, 5 and 6 give a summary of comments made in answer to these questions.

The members of the group described reaching a point of insight where they experienced that even heavy substance abuse couldn't entirely block out the realities they were trying to escape. And when they realised that there was something more to their life than being a slave to addiction. Their personal stories of turning their lives around were shared with great honesty and emotion. The personal insights

they had achieved were the reason they were in this program and a fundamental part of their motivation to learn a new skill and avoid relapse.

Asked why they were continuing to "stay clean", they described previous relapses and how much they realised that relapse can happen very quickly and destroy whatever life they had built for themselves in recovery. They talked about "fear" as an important element of their motivation to stay clean. Some of them believed that if they relapsed again, there wouldn't be a "second recovery" in them.

Others focused on how much they would lose (Table 5) if they relapsed. They described the feeling of being free of "something big"; the experience of seeing the world in a new way and feeling they had a place in the world; and the sense that they were now growing in a way that wasn't possible before.

When asked what they had learned in this course to help them stay clean, many people talked about slowing down and experiencing what was actually happening at any given moment in their life, rather than creating stories about how unsatisfactory life was or how they might dream it could be different. Some referred to feeling more at ease with painful emotions, and how attending to painful feelings had changed these emotions.

Supporting their practice beyond this course

There was a strong feeling in the group that they wanted to have some opportunity to continue to practice in a group setting. Clive offered to return for an hour each week and lead a sitting meditation for whoever might show up, it would be a simple exercise, with mainly silent practice and not too much discussion.

The team also identified mindfulness classes that were held weekly in the Sanctuary and Orla was happy for any of them to attend her formal Yoga courses in the city centre.

Finale

The group ended with a 10 minute sitting meditation and each participant was encouraged to give themselves credit for having completed the course and to have done their best at all stages throughout.

Table 6: What I have learned in this course

"I suppose gradually I'm losing fear the fear. Sometimes I get frightened of becoming frightened. Now, it's like thinking 'what's the worst that can happen? This too shall pass. It's like everything, it's impermanent, just sit with the discomfort and what's the worst that can happen? You're not going to use over this or to get a gun and put it in your mouth'"

"The yoga was great. The meditation was good too, I took some of the things you said, like 'bringing the puppy for a walk' and when Clive said that 'your days when thoughts are most (difficult) can be when you learn the most'"

"I started to slow down in my own mind… for example, for as long as I can remember, as soon as I woke up, I'd put the radio on… I can't remember anytime I didn't need noise… lately, I'm not interested in banging on noise as soon as I come in"

"I liked the last day in Wicklow. It was very sad for me but I didn't want to run… I was incredibly sad… but it was OK to be sad… I was very, very sad. I'm a country girl, it reminded me of my grandparents' farm… the whole thing there with my family. It was sheer pain. I remember sitting there by the swings thinking 'this is unbearable'… but it was OK…"

"I was waiting for the 15A (bus) the other day. An ambulance was whizzing by, it was absolutely chaotic… but I could hear the birds tweeting and I thought 'you're either having a nervous breakdown or a spiritual awakening… Jesus! Your life has done a 360, maybe it was worth all the work… connecting to nature on the middle of Pearse Street.' Before, if I was hungover and a bird was tweeting I'd want to kill it!"

Table 6 *(continued)*

"The whole thing at the start for me was a bit slow. I wanted to speed things up, I heard it was 'a life-changing experience'. Usually I make up so much drama…stories in my head… Now I'm watching a bit more what I'm thinking… I've had two fantastic weeks and I think it's a direct result of slowing down – I was so content."

"Addicts are never happy with what they have; they always want something bigger, better. When I heard your story (Frank's) it really made me appreciate what I have, appreciate my life, 'because most of the time I don't even notice it, I'm just obsessed with one thing or another"

"I loved that video we watched (Thich Nhat Hahn) where he said that your emotion is your baby and you don't run away from it…"

Evaluation of the Deora Program - Qualitative

An analysis of follow up 'qualitative' data based on one-to-one interviews two weeks following the course and 'quantitative' data based on pre- and post scores on psychometric measures

Two weeks after the Deora mindfulness course ended, one of the team (FS) met with each of the group members on a one-to-one basis and asked them a number of structured questions regarding their individual experiences. She also had each person complete a battery of tests that had also been administered prior to the course beginning.

Although the number of subjects (6) who completed pre- and post-questionnaires is much too small to form any conclusions regarding the impact of mindfulness training on a population in recovery from addiction, there were some interesting findings, which are reported below.

Participant 1

How was the course helpful to you in your recovery?

It got me to recognise that my feelings, good and bad, pass. Like the homework exercise, when we had to write down good and bad feelings and how they pass was great. The good ones made me laugh, the bad ones were hard… noticing the bad feelings passed made me feel guilty that I wasn't feeling good all the time. The homework helped me deal with it, accept it, 'I can't do anything about it'

How could the course have been more helpful to you?

I enjoyed it an awful lot. All of the course really except that sometimes the meditation was a bit long. I thought you (facilitators) were all great. I was delighted and honoured to do it, to be an addict and all! It has helped me to do things; especially the yoga was really helpful. I miss it to tell you the truth.

What was a key moment in your experience of the course?

- One of the major ones was discovering that good and bad feelings go, they pass. Teaching me not to dwell on things, teaching me I'm the problem in my own life. That I think I know better, want to do it my own way…being childish and stubborn.
- The yoga – how you feel with the energy, the total feel good factor from doing that kind of stuff
- Being involved in the group
- Giving me the learning tools to help someone else

What was the most challenging part of the course for you?

The body scan

What impact has the course had on:

(1) How you deal with your addiction and cravings

I've been lucky in that my cravings and compulsions had left me for a good while but this has helped and taught me that they will pass, that they're not me; that feelings are feelings, cravings are cravings. I can do a body scan to check in on where it's coming from, what's my part in this and why I'm letting it come in on me because I've dealt with these things. For me I notice a lot of the time it's to do with hunger

(2) Your relationships with others

When I do it right I give them space to say how they feel. I'd be thoughtful of them, that they have an opinion and a voice

(3) Your relationship with your family

In the same way (as with others) I'm just mindful of them and of myself, that I can fl y off the handle and sometimes I need to eat something 'because I get narky when I'm hungry. It's made me more aware. The danger for me is that I go back to my own way, thinking I'm better, that I'm fi xed, I'm OK, forgetting my problems

(4) Your work

I'm not working but it gets rid of some of the fear and more into the acceptance of myself… confidence.

How much do you practice mindfulness now?

I know it's good and I feel happier when I do it so if I don't it's me getting in my way again, I'm the problem. About 4-6 times a day I would do 'everyday mindfulness'. Sitting, I try to do 7 days but probably only do 4 or 5. I only do yoga if I have the space and time – twice a week if I'm lucky

Have you had any relapses since beginning the course?

No. Coffee is my only downfall. It makes my brain race a bit but I'm aware of it now

What kind of support would be helpful to you in maintaining your practice?

What Clive is doing – someone to come and sit with me. For me, actually getting out and doing yoga in a course because I fall short sometimes on my own, give in quicker. I'll try keep the meditation and prayer going. Just doing what I know is good and getting involved with other people doing the same – being nice to themselves.

Participant 2

How was the course helpful to you in your recovery?

It was very helpful because it confronted one of the many things you run from as an adult – the mind-body connection, and the spiritual element that's there by default. It confronted it in a gentle way as well. It was very compatible with the 12 steps; it didn't clash in any way with the ideology of the 12 steps.

It would have been a problem if it did… thought, prayers, meditation, conscious contact with yourself… the Mindfulness course did all of that..

[Speaking about the mind-body disconnection that occurs in addiction]

I walked around for 2 years with a shoulder that was out when I was addicted…. I did register the pain, got migraines etc., I felt it severely, but I was still running from it, wouldn't confront it.

The notion of the moment: walking in the moment, brushing your teeth… I feel like I'm doing it as supposed to projecting into the next thing where I'm supposed to be doing, doing what I should be doing. Because usually I've done something before I even start tackling it, my head's gone on to the next problem.

I confronted the notion of slowing down in the moment, confronted as supposed to spoke about it. There's kind of nowhere to go with it – it's confronted in a practical rather than an academic way. He (Tony) spoke of meditation, and the next thing he hits the gongs and you're doing it. Because it can seem very fluffy and intangible otherwise. Learning through doing makes it more challenging in every way.

How could the course have been more helpful to you?

The inclusion of the Body-scan homework at an earlier stage… in the John Kabat-Zinn book it seems to be the basis that you tune in to… it's so hard, it bored me, but that's not the point. It's one of the pillars.

A bit more structure… there were times it was perceived he (Tony) was winging it… I thought 'have you planned for today'?

Things like walking meditation were just put in very quickly at the end… seemed like rushing to the finish line for a while at the end. In Bray, when Clive was doing the 'address the thoughts, then the emotions' we hadn't really prepared enough. It was confusing over what we were meant to be doing… he kept asking 'what now? What next?'… you need to spoon feed for crises! Using cheesy slogans… in your face… simplicity can come in to your head in a crisis. It is ultimately about crisis intervention at times.

Be more forceful about insisting people do their homework, not to criticise, but to out them, you get what you put in There's a responsibility element – people wandering out and in of sessions (although when asked she did not feel we should get overly strict about attendance)

What was a key moment in your experience of the course?

Realising that I don't have my ears constantly shoved with noise… it just happened… I didn't notice for a week. Something's different. I don't need it now, I choose it. The change had happened, I didn't catch it for a few days.

I would try practice the homework; the key thing for me was the absolute unwillingness to do it. All talk and no action is only all talk and no action. I need discipline. It's important for me to recognise that – the observation of my own reluctance.

The day in Wicklow was hard, but hey, I didn't run away from it. I was able to remain in the day.

What was the most challenging part of the course for you?

The discipline aspect around the homework, it still is very challenging. There are days I'd rather watch grass grow than listen to my own breathing. Basically, the practice was the main challenge, not thinking about it, talking etc. The people in the course were lovely. No one put in or out on me. … I found I noticed my own insecurity, that I was worrying about nothing.

What impact has the course had on:

(1) Your addiction and cravings?

A profound impact noticing the thought and leaving it be. Before, I'd need a strategy to make a cup of tea… I'd judge my own thoughts etc.

I was so sick last week, I had a huge desire to get sleeping pills, it would have been no problem but I said no, I'd sit with the discomfort.

It's intercepted the disease in some way. I sat with it. It was horrible, awful, about as far away from the sereneness of yoga as you can get but I was ok.

I'm so much more appreciative of my body sensations. I was so happy to be well after… I encompassed gratitude versus just huge relief and giving a one hour long hour lecture to anyone who would listen on how bad it was.

It intercepted my recovery from a point of view of gratitude and allowing every cell in my body to feel well versus just relieved and retrospective about how lucky I was to survive and all the feelings that go with it.

(2) Your relationships with others?

At times I'm less reactive… I'm more inside of my own body, I'm able to say: 'there's a situation, I have an opinion on it', 9 times out of 10 it's none of my business, it will be a situation I created.

Primarily, I've slowed down. My main difficulty was my relationship with myself, the impact on my relationship with others was an added benefit…

I'm at all times 100% aware that if I'm feeling intolerable or irritable with someone it's usually triggered by something within me. Generally, I'm more chilled out with myself, on a good day. For me it'd be the lifetime achievement award if I can improve my relationship with myself.

(3) Your relationship with your family

My family and I don't have a relationship… my family is a sick entity. The notion of detaching with love, getting in to madness, being a doormat for it or accelerating me… it's down to my role (within the family) and my relationship with myself. I can be rational with anyone else but as soon as I walk in the door at home I'm the sister, the daughter, I'm right back… I've detached… I need to be careful of being around them as they are a trigger. I'm not avoiding them in a diseased way, not running but avoiding them in a self-preservation way – detaching versus avoiding – it's solution based. It's an important distinction, a shift in perception. Avoidance is a mechanism; the perception is I'm not avoiding them for it but detaching for self-preservation. My head's in the solution, not the disease.

(4) Your work/study

Before I was obsessed, went to extremes… should be studying 24 hours a day… one week ago I found myself slipping back to that… I haven't achieved the balance but I'm striving towards it so my head's still in recovery. I used to use a lot of drugs at exam time and I got through, so now I don't have that I've got to use what I have.

How much do you practice mindfulness now?

Generally, when I'm walking… I try to do something in the morning and at bed time… twice or three times a day… I don't take it overly seriously either because you'd hate it

Have you had any relapse since beginning the course?

No

What kind of support would be helpful to you in maintaining your practice?

Practice, to keep connected with it. Post-course strategy, like after care, discuss how to make it work… an after care model… personally, I meditate anyway, I will probably go to the Buddhist Centre, I've got on to Plum Village, I can't do the retreat but they do have a magazine – The Bell… the AA do Grapevine, you use it between meetings to keep it real, because things fade into the background.

My idea is to practice with meditation, get the magazine and try get to Plum Village (Edith is interested in going too). The Dublin Buddhist Centre does groups so I'll touch base with them… I'll try and keep it up. It's like a diet: you know exactly what not to eat but you can always start tomorrow.

Participant 3

How was the course helpful to you in your recovery?

It was helpful in the sense that it helped me to meditate and I'm meant to be doing that for my 11th step.

It's helped me to stay more in the present moment I'm not as stressed because I'm more relaxed and clear headed, not miles ahead or behind (myself)

How could the course have been more helpful to you?

The long body scan at the start could've been shorter, to build things up more gradually. More yoga and to start it earlier in the course The homework – like a journal, you can look over how you've changed during the week, like keeping yourself in check and on the ball… to be aware of your behaviour and how you're reacting so you can change in time before drastic consequences.

What was a key moment in your experience of the course?

I really liked the yoga.
I liked how we chatted about things, the friendly atmosphere; it was never awkward or uneasy.

What was the most challenging part of the course for you?

The long periods of meditation and the body scan… trying to stay mindful without daydreaming.

What impact has the course had on:

(1) Dealing with your addiction and cravings

I'm doing the 11th step so it helped by helping me to meditate, to do the 11th step. It's definitely helped, without a doubt, the combination of both (the 12 steps and the Mindfulness). Tony seems to have a good understanding of the steps.

(2) Your relationship with others

In general I'm a bit more chilled out, calmer. I'm wired naturally but I'm more relaxed… I'm trying not to fl y ahead or go into the past because that does affect other people, even if you don't intend it to… This (the benefits) is only if I keep it up.

(3) Your relationship with your family

Similar to my relationship with others (see above)

(4) Your work

N/A

How much do you practice mindfulness now?

Everyday I practice in some way. I haven't done any yoga. I try to do sitting on a daily basis… Walking, not as much, I do more driving meditation! I don't walk much and when I do I'm on a mission.

Have you had any relapses since beginning the course?

No

What kind of support do you need to maintain your practice?

Daily practice

Participant 4

How was the course helpful to you in your recovery?

Not Mindfulness as a whole but the meditation and yoga and the different techniques helped. I don't think I got what the whole Mindfulness thing was.

How could the course have been more helpful to you?

It would be great if you could get an addict to teach it… someone from where they're from (the participants). Frank was inspirational, but you need someone more like them. Mindfulness seems a bit far-fetched. It seemed like the people who were doing it were so far ahead and they were just trying to dumb it down for us… they could have talked more about how they started, their own difficulties in doing it and what helped.

If you got people who weren't that long clean they might be more willing to open up, because myself, I have my own thing, I can be set in my own ways.

People might be more susceptible earlier on. There's a lot done in counselling and addiction, people have heard this all before.

What stage of recovery do you think the course should be offered at?

It's hard to say – it's a bit of a paradox. You need to mix it up.
Did you find the course compatible with the 12 steps?

Yeah, there's a lot that's similar… the only thing that's missing would be talking about a faith

How could the course have been more helpful to you?

More meditation and yoga in the classes, mix it up, not to have a whole class of just talking… do a bit in each class, keep people energised. Some days it seemed a bit like you (team) were winging it.

The homework seemed a bit extreme – 40 minutes is too much (this was the time period each participant was asked to devote daily to completing all the homework assignments, e.g. sitting practice, yoga, writing journal, reading) It's hard enough for people to arrive here every week… at least that's true for myself.

Were there any key moments in the course for you?

To sit up straight doing meditation. My posture was the biggest thing I got out of it, and the yoga.

What was the most challenging aspect of the course?

3 hours a day (for a session) is too long, 2 hours a day would be better

The video (Thich Nhat Than) wasn't believable. I don't want to be like that, it's a bit extreme for someone only getting in to it. You should show more about the benefits of doing it than just, 'here's a man doing it!'

What impact, if any, did the course have on:

(1) Your addiction and cravings

None

(2) Your relationship with others

The meditation slowed me down, I got in to it more

(3) Your relationship with your family

Same (see above)

(4) Your work

Yeah, I work with people so if I'm calmer with myself I'm more approachable and listen more

How much practice are you doing now?

The meditation, and I try to do a bit of yoga. I do one or other each day for 20 minutes… I liked the body scan CD

Have you had any relapse since beginning the course?

No

What kind of supports do you need to maintain your practice?

My CDs and Orla once a week

Participant 5

How was the course helpful to you in your recovery?

I think it disciplined me in to the meditation and helped me to sit with myself more. It was helpful for the meditation end of things, helped me relax, made me more aware of my thoughts and feeling and more aware of me I suppose. I've cried a lot since starting, I actually welcomed it; it was a matter of learning how to cope I suppose. It did leave me vulnerable but it was ok

How could the course have been more helpful to you?

I'm not sure

What was the most challenging aspect of the course for you?

The motivation to turn up was the only thing I found hard, was just to get up and do it.

How did you find the homework?

The writing part… when I walked out the door (after the session) if forgot about it (to do it). But with the CDs I was bringing them home and putting them on, and doing it.

How did you fi nd the CDs?

I like them; I listened to 'From Fear to Fearlessness' at home. The 10 minutes (Tony's guided meditation) is flying now.

Were there any key moments for you on the course?

None that stick out, it was just gradual, I didn't come in one day and think, 'I can do this', it just sort of fell together

What impact, if any, has the course had on:

(1) Your addiction and your cravings

I don't think it has. I know if I get a stressful situation I'll do the 3 minute breathing thing so I suppose that helps and I got home on a bad day, I thought 'I've arrived, I'm home…' so it was taking my mind off what I'm going through. When I joined I didn't think it was about addiction, but that it was a meditation course, so it's not like I didn't get what I was expecting

(2) Your relationships

Maybe it has – not so much on my relationships, but more on me – I've become so much more aware of myself. To deal with what I'm learning about myself but at the same time maintaining my relationships without letting it affect me

(3) Your family

I think I'm able to stay with them a lot more than I was. It used to be half an hour and I'd leave. A few weeks ago I was able to stay for 8 hours. I dunno if that was a result of the course but it was a big change.

(4) Your work/study

I dunno, I fi nished in the last 4 months. My examiner said I excelled in exams but I dunno if that's why. I did study for them.

How often do you practice?

Everyday for 10 minutes in the morning and then another 15 minutes during the day. I'm trying to do the yoga on my own but I find it very hard.

Have you had any relapses since beginning the course?

No, I have felt like it, thought about it, but it's not what I want.

What kind of supports would be helpful to you in maintaining your practice?

The CDs, discipline to do them and having the time in the morning. I would love to have it (CDs) on MP3.

Follow-up would be good, a follow-up meeting and I plan to come sit with Clive…. I got the number for the meditation centre, I'm definitely going to keep it up.

A lot of hard stuff is coming up but it's all for my own benefit and growth is coming.

When is the right stage in recovery to introduce this course?

The right stage to cope? You don't know if you will be until it comes up, people who dropped out probably weren't there (at the right stage). I knew I needed something else, I'm not getting support in day-to-day counselling to deal with it so I went and organised additional psychotherapy to help.

I don't think there should be a time – one year clean or you're not in – not a time frame. If I'd done this after one month I would've relapsed. Really early recovery isn't a good idea at all. The criteria should be about: the person; what you want to get from this; and that you're going to stay clean at all costs.

Did you feel that we could have done something more to support people feeling vulnerable during the course?

Maybe do raise the issue again after the first session; that you might need extra support. Put it out in some way what to expect, but when it happens it's different

How did this course fit with the 12 steps?

I dropped my sponsor because I found out I didn't value her recovery, she wasn't really there for me… it's her job to guide me through recovery but she didn't call me back (when I had called her in a crisis)… they would run side by side because meditation is the 11th step.

When I heard at the start it would be a life-changing experience, it was like, wow! It was life-changing but it has been in a different way in me than I expected….

Outside stuff – things like how you view yourself, the outside world – it's been life changing in how I see my own awareness. I totally misunderstood, I thought everything would be great, calm and peaceful… it's more of a reality check… I didn't get it but now it's like, this is what they meant. It's all good, growth and change and I'm open to it.

Has the course met your expectations?

I think so, it probably went over it, I did the meditation and yoga, met friends, learnt to sit with myself… I got more out of it than I expected.

Where to from here?

I definitely want to keep it up; I would love to partake in the next course (in some way)

Participant 6

(part of the interview is missing as the transcription was lost)

How was the course helpful to you in your recovery?

Very. The information… I was practicing a bit of meditation before so it confirms that and gives me motivation.

It's very simple, not a complex thing, but sometimes I worry if I'm doing it right I think it's going to prove itself over time versus getting a huge dramatic result, but I expect it's going to help me a huge amount… it's a process, you evolve with the process

How could the course have been more helpful?

At the start, the body scan, the length of it put me off. Initially it was too slow but introductions have to be made, settling down other than that was great.

Were there any key moments for you during the course?

I remember feeling 'oh yeah, this is it at one stage', I felt high, brilliant, but it didn't last. One thing important to say is that I was on Prozac, when I started, now I'm not. I'm kind of stepping up to life. I'll try it, if it doesn't work I'll go back – I said it to my counsellor.

I'm more enthusiastic about life

Something we did with Clive – the Pema Chodron CD was fantastic, I had heard it before but it made more sense to me. She was talking about "Maitri".

How often do you practice now?

Daily

Evaluation of the Deora Program – Quantative

Method

Individuals who voluntarily participated in the 10-week MBRP program completed a range of quantitative assessments pre- and post-course. The goal of this study was to measure the impact of participating in a 10-week MBRP program on participants' psychological functioning, quality of life and mindful qualities. Due to the sample size, lack of a control group, and lack of controlling for the level of pre-existing substance abuse on outcomes, it is not feasible to generalise from these results.

However, when taken together with the qualitative feedback from participants, the results offer tentative suggestions on the potential of applying Mindfulness-based approaches to support people recovering from addiction.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited for interview from local rehabilitation services on the basis of a referral from their key worker. Over 100 individuals were referred for interview. Selection criteria for interview included the applicant demonstrating an interest in learning more about mindfulness, and being drug-free (including methadone) for at least six months.

Nineteen individuals were selected for interview, 15 of whom were accepted to participate in the program.

The semi-structured interviews were carried out by the Program Director TB (Clinical Psychologist) and an assistant FS (psychology graduate). The questions were tailored to establish brief background knowledge of the applicants, including their history of substance abuse, psychological history, treatment history and current treatment. The interview also explored any previous experience with meditation and their reason for interest in the program. Exclusion criteria for proceeding to participate in the program included the individual reporting symptoms of current distress and the absence of a supportive relationship with a key worker.

On the basis of these interviews, 15 participants were selected to voluntarily participate in the 10-week MBRP program.

Analyses

Participants were required to give their written consent to take part and to complete a series of quantitative assessments one-week prior to beginning the program. One-week after completing the program, participants were required to complete a post-course assessment. There was no control group in this study.

The assessments used were the Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS 21), The Life Orientation Test – Revised (Lot – R, Sheirer, Carver & Bridges), Resilience Scale (RS), World Health Organisation Quality of Life (WHOQOL-Bref), Kentucky Inventory Mindfulness Scale (Kims, Baer) and the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale (CAMS-R, Feldman).

Of the 15 participants who began the program, nine completed it. However, the current data analyses include only the participants who completed both the pre- and post-course assessments. The final sample size was seven participants, this sample size is too small to have statistical power therefore results cannot be generalised.

Participants

Fifteen participants entered the MBRP program, six were male and nine were female ranging in age from 28 – 48 years (M = 33.8, SD = 5.95). All of the participants had a history of multiple addictions, length of use ranged from 6 – 24 years (M = 15.5, SD = 5.95). Two of the participants' addictions were limited to alcohol and prescription medication, eight had a history of abusing multiple Class A drugs such as speed, ecstasy, heroin and crack cocaine. Data regarding the history of drug use was missing for 3 participants.

Three participants had spent time in prison. None of the participants were using illicit drugs or alcohol at the onset of the program. One participant reported taking prescribed anti-depressants at the onset. All of the participants were currently working through the 12 step program, and they were all receiving support from a sponsor, a key

worker or a counsellor. Six participants had previous experience of meditation, three of whom practiced on a regular basis. None of the participants had any previous experience of mindfulness training. Two participants had a primary school education or less, six had a secondary school education, and six had completed tertiary education. One participant was in full-time employment, two were unemployed, one was in vocational training, and five were students.

Independent sample t-tests revealed no significant differences between baseline assessments of participants who completed the program (n=7) and those who did not (n=8). One-tailed paired samples t-tests compared means of participants' pre- and post course assessments.

Improvements were found in participants' self reported level of psychological functioning, quality of life and mindful qualities. However, not all of these improvements reached statistical significance. This may have been due to a lack of statistical power in the data set due to the small sample size (n=7).

Participants showed significant improvements in their quality of life relating to their social relations and their satisfaction with their environment. The most substantial improvement they reported was in their social relations. There was a trend toward improved physical and psychological functioning however it did not reach statistical significance.

Neither of the mindfulness scales used detected a significant improvement in participants' mindful qualities, however, there was a trend toward an improvement. Participants did report significant improvement in three of the fours subscales of the KIMS. The greatest improvement was in their ability to act with awareness; they also reported improvement in their ability to observe their thoughts and feelings and to act without judgement.

They reported a slight improvement in their ability to describe their thoughts and feelings; however this improvement was not significant.

The results indicated a trend toward improvement in participants' optimism and resilience, however changes were not found to be significant.

Participants self-reported significant reductions in their levels of stress, anxiety and depression after taking part in the course.

Discussion

Given the small sample size and the lack of a control group in this study all results must be interpreted cautiously. A sample of seven participants does not allow for the statistical power necessary to draw any firm conclusions regarding the usefulness of MBRP for individuals recovering from multiple and enduring addictions. Moreover, the lack of follow-up data impedes us from determining whether any gains achieved through the course were maintained in the months after completion. Therefore, we cannot generalise from these results, however, we can take encouragement from tentative evidence of the benefits of MBRP reported in this pilot study. When taken together with the qualitative data collected throughout the course of the study, and with previous research that has been carried out on MBRP internationally, it can be concluded that the use of MBRP in supporting people recovering from addiction shows promise and warrants further research.

The analyses revealed improvements in participants' self-reported levels of psychological functioning, quality of life, levels of optimism, resilience and mindful qualities. Not all of these results were statistically significant, however all showed trends toward improvement in the expected direction. The most significant improvements found in all the scales were in their ability to accept their thoughts and feelings and in their satisfaction with their social relationships. This suggests the use of MBRP may benefit people recovering from multiple and enduring addictions.

It is interesting to note that neither of the overall scores on the two mindfulness scales reached statistical significance. Yet the KIMS detected significant improvement in participants' mindful qualities. This suggests that participants were better able to observe their thoughts and feelings, to act with awareness and to accept without judgement after taking part in the course. However, their ability to describe their thoughts and feelings was not significantly improved as a result. They reported a greater ability to practice core mindfulness skills, while still having difficulty in articulating their thoughts and feelings. While no causation can be inferred, their increased ability to accept their own thoughts and feelings is likely to have aided them in their ability to be more tolerant of others, and to be more sensitive to the results of their own behaviour. This would fit well with their increased satisfaction in social relationships that was found both quantitatively ($p=.2$) and reported in qualitative feedback.

There was a trend toward improvement in participants' self-reported quality of life, this was most notable in their satisfaction with their social relationships and their physical environment. This finding is compatible with their improved ability to accept without judgement which they reported. While no causation can be inferred, this finding suggests they may have applied this mindful quality to better accept their relationships with others and their physical environment. Participants reported slight improvement in their psychological and physical functioning, however neither of these was significant.

The lack of significant improvement in psychological functioning is in keeping with the lack of significant improvement of optimism or resilience. This suggests that the course did not significantly improve protective factors relating to mental health. However, the DASS-21 detected significant reductions in stress, anxiety, and depression suggesting a decrease in participants' experiences of negative psychological states.

Summary and recommendations

This 8-week course was an exploration of the value of mindfulness training to the complex process of recovering from an addiction and staying "clean". It was never presented as a grand solution to the problem of addiction, but as an adjunct to a range of therapies and programs from which the participants had already benefited.

Meditation of any kind is not an easy subject to explain. The experience of practice, rather than any number of explanations or descriptions is what allows an individual to grasp for themselves what it means.

As a result those who have limited or no experience of meditation often hold many misconceptions about it. Thirteen adults began the course and seven were still there at the final meeting. Of those who dropped out early on, we know that some of them found returning to the drug service for a weekly course was itself upsetting as they preferred to think they had left all that behind them. Two reported that they found it hard to be in a room "full of addicts" after being successfully clean for a long time. These are issues that we would anticipate and address more rigorously in any future selection process.

It may be that if an individual has successfully stayed clean away from the ethos of a drug counselling service, then their introduction to mindfulness training should be in some very neutral location where there is no special focus on addiction.

Of those who completed the course, all reported that they found it that mindfulness made sense to them, and that it had strengthened them in their recovery.

Only one individual reported that he still didn't "get mindfulness" by the end of the course.

Due to constraints in the design and sample size of the quantitative study, we cannot draw any firm conclusions on the benefits of applying mindfulness to relapse prevention. However, the results

were encouraging and clearly indicate that further research in this area is warranted.

Overall the participants appreciated those experiences of mindfulness which were facilitated by different course exercises. As one participant said: "He (TB) spoke of meditation, and the next thing he hits the gong and you're doing it. Because it can seem very fluffy and intangible otherwise. Learning through doing makes it more challenging in every way."

From the earliest session, short simple introductory exercises were used to keep the teaching sessions experiential and avoid prolonged conceptual debate. Furthermore, the early sessions focused on basic exercises that involved the body, as a way of helping people to reconnect with their bodies and become thereby grounded in the present moment. Exercises such as the body Scan and Hatha yoga stretches were particularly successful in bringing participants into mindful awareness of the present moment. Many identified yoga as the most helpful aspect of the 8-week program, but it's probably the case that no one of theses exercises stands alone. The mix may be critical, and the timing of how each exercise is introduced remains an open and important question.

What was striking was that each participant reported that they were practicing daily, - generally a 10- 15 minute sitting meditation - in the follow up interviews.

What didn't work well in this group was having participants do a long body scan exercise early on. This was simply the result of our choice to use Jon Kabat-Zinn's pre-recorded 45 minute guided CD on body scan. This is a very useful resource, but if we were to repeat this course we would want to provide participants with a 15-20 body scan exercise, preferably recorded by one of the group leaders.

Perhaps their practice could evolve in time into a longer, fuller Body Scan.

Another learning was the need to introduce Yoga much earlier on, probably from the opening session. Due to the unavailability of our yoga teacher until week 3, we were not able to introduce this component of the program until the group was up and running. One participant reported that he didn't feel he "got what the whole mindfulness thing was". As he put it: "Mindfulness seems a bit far-fetched. It seemed like the people who were doing it were so far ahead and they were just trying to dumb it down for us… they could have talked more about how they started, their own difficulties in doing it and what helped…it would be great if you could get an addict to teach it".

Our hope would be that through this report, the concept of mindfulness will be brought alive, off the pages of text book definitions, by conveying the participants' own experience of practicing mindfulness, of their struggles as well as their gains.

One thing that definitely came through is that it's not easy. In the words of one participant "there are days I'd rather sit and watch grass grow than listen to my own breathing". We would hope that their words and their stories will go some way to 'de-mystifying' mindfulness for people who may be interested in participating in future. In addition, we would hope that some of the participants will eventually go on to train in mindfulness themselves and teach future programs. Two of the participants were exploring the possibility of going on a mindfulness retreat in Plum Village at the time of the follow-up interviews which was encouraging in this regard.

The impact of mindfulness that was most relevant to this group is that it taught them to be less afraid of stopping and being with their experience, however easy or difficult it was, in the here and now.

Participants described in various ways how they had learned to stop running form the present, through distractions of one sort or another and to simply be with themselves. They discovered their reason for running was a fear of being overwhelmed by some feeling they had if they were to acknowledge its presence. However, they discovered for

themselves that the effect of trying to run from, or suppress, negative feelings was to leave them feeling permanently on edge and therefore vulnerable to returning to addictive behaviours that had helped them avoid feelings in the past.

Playing the DVD of Thich Nhat Hanh on "Coping with Emotional Storms" seems to have been especially helpful to all participants, bar one in the group. The message contained in this talk was simple: Our feelings are not our enemy, they are a part of us that needs care and attention. And that if we stay present to our feelings they naturally transform and pass. For each participant, different feelings may cause distress and threaten to overwhelm them.

In this course we focused on painful emotions like hurt, sadness, anger. I think in future courses we would recommend focussing on feelings and urges broadly fitting the description of "cravings" which can arise in the presence or absence of distress. This is an aspect of relapse prevention that has been very well developed by Alan Marlatt. For this reason (and many other good reasons) we would recommend making contact with Marlatt and his Colleagues in Seattle Washington, seeking permission to incorporate his exercises for "coping with urges and cravings".

In the light of our experience in this program we would recommend focusing on cravings early on in any mindfulness training course. We had the good fortune to attend a two day training event in Copenhagen with Alan Marlatt but we were already at week seven so that it was too late to incorporate his insights into this program. One of the differences between the program we ran and Marlatt's program is that he gets straight on to the issue of cravings in the first session tailoring it around addiction specifically from the outset.

Marlatt and his colleagues use a lot of metaphors in their program. For example, they offered a variety of metaphors to give participants easy ways to observe their thoughts e.g. imagine your thoughts as leaves on a river floating along; or clouds in the sky floating past and dissolving; or as if you're sitting in the cinema watching the words/thoughts on the screen. They also used the imagery of a pig to help participants to externalise their cravings and gain control over them. e.g. imagine your craving as a greedy pig, the more you feed it, the stronger it gets.

We believe incorporating the creative elements to the course would be helpful in future programs as participants need strong associations with simple messages to get them through crises. As one of the participants on our course put it:: "You need to be spoon fed for crises! Using cheesy slogans… in your face… simplicity can come in to your head in a crisis. It is ultimately about crisis intervention at times."

Marlatt and his research group have just embarked on a major study of the benefits of mindfulness training in the treatment of addiction. It may be very useful for future programs to establish formal contact with his group and explore possibility of using the same training and research evaluation protocol. That way learnings on both sides of the Atlantic could be shared and data also.

Another striking feature of Marlatt's program is that they accept anyone on to the program that was referred by the local rehabilitation

services. They did not exclude people taking methadone, very violent offenders or people experiencing psychotic episodes.

As Alan Marlatt himself stated when questioned on this policy at the workshop in Copenhagen: "My position is that anyone can benefit from this. If they're not getting anything out of it they can drop out. They can always give it a try"

Overall, this was a very enjoyable experience for all of us who worked on this program, and, by all accounts, for the participants themselves. This is not an insignificant observation. We have heard reports of patients in certain mindfulness courses who found the program very "heavy going". Basically, the aim of mindfulness is to open our minds and hearts to an appreciation of the present, and to an experience of gratitude for simply being alive at all. When I attend Plum Village, the monastery of Thich Nhat Hahn in the south of France, what strikes me is that this practice is one which gives people a sense of joy and well being. And that if it doesn't, one is probably trying too hard, or simply approaching it with the wrong attitude.

It seems only logical that if we can present mindfulness training with a lightness of touch, and with a sense of joy, in our courses, the likelihood of sustained practice afterwards will be much greater.

6 Week Introductory Course In Mindfulness Meditation

1st Week – Mindfulness of Breathing

by Gil Fronsdal

Source:

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Insight meditation, or Vipassana, is one of the central teachings of the Buddha. It has continued as a living practice for 2500 years. At the heart of insight meditation is the practice of mindfulness, the cultivation of clear, stable and non-judgmental awareness. While mindfulness practice can be highly effective in helping bring calm and clarity to the pressures of daily life, it is also a spiritual path that gradually dissolves the barriers to the full development of our wisdom and compassion.

During the six-week introductory course, the basic instructions in insight meditation are given sequentially, each week building on the previous one.

- The first week focuses on the basics of meditation and on mindfulness of breathing.
- The second week discusses mindfulness of the body and expands the area of attention to include all our physical experiences.
- The third week introduces mindfulness of emotions,
- The fourth week mindfulness of thinking,

- The fifth week mindfulness of mind, and the sixth week focuses on the role of mindfulness in daily life and in deepening one's spiritual life.

Insight meditation is nothing more mysterious than developing our ability to pay attention to our immediate experience. We are often pre-occupied with thoughts about the past or the future or with fantasies. While sometimes such pre-occupations may be innocent and harmless, more often they contribute to stress, fear and suffering. Mindfulness practice is learning how to overcome pre-occupation so that we can see clearly what is happening in our lived experience of the present. In doing so, we find greater clarity, trust, and integrity. Mindfulness relies on an important characteristic of awareness: awareness by itself does not judge, resist, or cling to anything. By focusing on simply being aware, we learn to disentangle ourselves from our habitual reactions and begin to have a friendlier and more compassionate relationship with our experience, with ourselves and with others.

Mindfulness is the practice of being attentively present. It is called a practice in the same way that we say that people practise the piano. Being attentive is a skill that grows with practice. It develops best if we set aside any self-conscious judgements or expectations of how our meditation is developing. The practice is simply to relax and bring forth an awareness of what is happening in the present. In order both to develop the skill and experience the joys of non-reactive presence, a daily meditation practice is helpful.

Mindfulness of Breathing

Insight Meditation usually begins with awareness of breathing. This is an awareness practice, not an exercise in breathing; there is no need to adjust the breathing in any way. We simply attend to the breath, getting to know it as it is: shallow or deep, long or short, slow or fast, smooth or rough, coarse or refined, constricted or loose. When we

get distracted by thoughts or emotions, we simply return to the physical sensations of the breath.

Because of the mind's tendency to be scattered and easily distracted, we use the breath as a kind of anchor to the present. When we rest in the breath, we are countering the strong forces of distraction. We train the mind, heart, and body to become settled and unified on one thing, at one place, at one time. If you are sitting in meditation and your mind is on what you did at work today, then your mind and body are not in the same place at the same time. Fragmented this way, we all too easily lose touch with a holistic sense of ourselves.

Mindfulness of breathing is a powerful ally in our lives. With steady awareness of our inhalations
and exhalations, the breath can become an equi-animous constant through the ups and downs of our daily life. Resting with, even enjoying, the cycles of breathing, we are less likely to be caught up in the emotional and mental events that pass through us. Repeatedly returning to the breath can be a highly effective training in letting go of the identification and holding which freeze the mind and heart. It also develops concentration.

Exercises for the first week

You will get the most benefit from this course if you engage yourself with the practice during the week between our class meetings. During the first week please try the following three practices:

1) Sit one twenty-minute session of meditation each day. For this first week, focus on staying aware of your breath as described in the next section of the handout. Begin and end each sitting with, a minute of conscious reflection: At the start, clearly remind yourself that you are about to devote yourself to being mindful and present. Consciously let go of any concerns, remembering that you will have plenty of time to take them up again later. At the end, reflect on what happened during your meditation session.

There is no need to judge what happened; you just want to strengthen your mindfulness through a brief exercise in recollection.

2) Choose one routine physical activity that you perform most days and experiment with doing it mindfully. This means doing just this one activity while you are doing the exercise - not listening to the radio at the same time, for example. It is also best to let go of any concern about the results or in finishing quickly. Remain in the present as best you can. When the mind wanders, simply come back to the activity. Activities you might choose include brushing your teeth, washing the dishes, or some routine act of driving or walking.

3) For one half-hour period during the week, maintain some regular attention of your posture as you go about with some normal activity. Without straining, assume a posture that is alert and upright. Notice what happens to your mood, thoughts, feelings, presence, and degree of mindfulness as you do this exercise.

Breathing Meditation 1 (Kabat-Zinn 1996)

Assume a comfortable posture lying on your back or sitting. If you are sitting, keep the spine straight and let your shoulders drop.

Close your eyes if it feels comfortable.

Bring your attention to your belly, feeling it rise or expand gently on the in-breath and fall or recede on the out-breath.

Keep your focus on the breathing, „being with" each in-breath for its full duration and with each out-breath for its full duration, as if you were riding the waves of your own breathing.

Every time you notice that your mind has wandered off the breath, notice what it was that took you away and then gently bring your attention back to your belly and the feeling of the breath coming in and out.

If your mind wanders away from the breath a thousand times, then your job is simply to bring it back to the breath every time, no matter what it becomes preoccupied with.

Practise this exercise for fifteen minutes at a convenient time every day, whether you feel like it or not, for one week and see how it feels to incorporate a disciplined meditation practice into your life. Be aware of how it feels to spend some time each day just being with your breath without having to do anything.

Breathing Meditation 2 (Kabat-Zinn 1996)

 Tune into your breathing at different times during the day, feeling the belly go through one or two risings and fallings.
 Become aware of your thoughts and feelings at these moments, just observing them without judging them or yourself.
 At the same time, be aware of any changes in the way you are seeing things and feeling about yourself.

Meditation instruction: Mindfulness of breathing

Sit in a comfortable but alert posture. Gently close your eyes. Take a couple of deep breaths, and, as you exhale, settle into your body, relaxing any obvious tension or holding. Then, breathing normally, bring your awareness to your body, sensing for a short while how the body presents itself to you. There is no particular way to be; just notice how you are at this moment.

Then, from within the body, as part of the body, become aware of your breathing, however it happens to appear. There is no right or wrong way to breathe while doing mindfulness practice; the key is to simply notice how it actually is right now. Let the breath breathe itself, allowing it to be received in awareness. Notice where in your body you feel the breath most clearly. This may be the abdomen rising and falling, the chest expanding and contracting, or the tactile sensations of the air passing through the nostrils or over the upper

lip. Wherever the breath tends to appear most clearly, allow that area to be the home, the centre of your attention.

Keep your attention connected with the inhalations and exhalations, sensing the physical sensations that characterize them. Let go of the surface concerns of the mind. Whenever the mind wanders away, gently come back to the breath. There is no need to judge the wandering mind; when you notice that the mind has wandered, simply return to the breath without evaluation.

To help maintain contact between awareness and the breath, you may use a label or mental note. Softly, like a whisper in the mind, label the in-breath and out-breath, encouraging the awareness to stay present with the breath. You can label the inhalations and exhalations as "in" and "out," or perhaps use "rising" and "falling" for the movement of the abdomen or the chest. Don't worry about finding the right word, just use something that will help you stay connected.

There is no need to force the attention on the breath; to strengthen your ability to become mindful and present, use the gentle power of repeatedly, non judgmentally returning and resting with the breath.

Sources:

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Website: www.insightmeditationcenter.org

www.getselfhelp.co.uk/mindfulness.htm - www.get.gg

2nd Week – Mindfulness of the Body

by Gil Fronsdal

Mindfulness of breathing is a wonderful beginning to cultivating awareness. It strengthens our ability to concentrate and steadies the attention on our present moment experience. It also weakens our tendency to get lost in reactive emotions and mental preoccupations. With time, attention to the breath helps us to develop a clear, non-reactive awareness that can then be turned to the full range of our human experience. As mindfulness develops, we begin to bring this awareness to other areas of our lives.

Mindfulness is an embodied practice. By practicing mindfulness, we learn to live in and through our bodies. Learning to be mindful of bodily experiences is one of the most useful aspects of mindfulness. It is much easier have a balanced, healthy awareness of the rest of our lives when we are in touch with our immediate physical experience.

During this week we expand the practice to include the body.

Many people ignore their bodies. The busier a person's life, the easier it is to discount the importance of staying in touch with how the body feels. Many people may be attentive to their body, but it is from the outside in; that is, they are concerned about body image and appearance. Mindfulness of the body is attention from the inside out. We notice what the body is feeling, in and of itself. We give a generous amount to time to be with the felt sense of the body. Not only does this help the body relax, remaining mindful of the body is a safeguard from getting wound up with mental preoccupations.

Benefits of mindfulness of the body

Mindfulness of the body has several benefits. First, cultivating mindfulness of the body increases our familiarity with our bodies and with how the body responds to our inner and outer lives, to our thoughts and emotions, and to events around us. The Buddha saw the human mind and body as unified.

When we suppress or ignore aspects of our emotional, cognitive, and volitional lives, we tend also to disconnect from the body, from the physical manifestations of our experience. Conversely, when we distance ourselves from our physical experience, we lose touch with our inner life of emotions and thoughts. The awakening of the body from within that comes with mindfulness can help us to discover, not only our repressed emotions, but also, more importantly, a greater capacity to respond to the world with healthy emotions and motivations.

Second, in cultivating mindfulness we are developing non-reactivity, including the ability to be present for our experience without turning away, habitually seeking or resisting change, or clinging to pleasant and avoiding unpleasant experience. All too often, our automatic desires, aversions, preferences, and judgments interfere with our ability to know what is actually happening. Learning to not respond automatically and unconsciously makes possible a deeper understanding of the present moment and our reaction to it, and gives us more freedom to choose our response. Being non-reactively present for our physical experience goes a long way in learning to do so with the rest of our lives.

Last, but not least, mindfulness of physical sensations helps us both to relax tension and to understand its causes.

Mindfulness Exercises For The Second Week

1. Continue your daily twenty-minute meditation session.

2. In the midst of your regular activities, devote two one-hour periods during the week to being mindful of your body. During this time, perhaps using a timer or some other cue to remind yourself, periodically check in with your body, maybe every five minutes or so. Notice, in particular, your shoulders, stomach, face, and hands. If you find tension in any of these places, relax.

3. Devote one meal to eating slowly and mindfully, paying attention to the tastes, textures, temperature, and other qualities of your food, and to the experience of your body eating. (When does your body tell you that have had enough?) If possible, take the meal in silence, with no other activities to distract you. You might want to put down your spoon or fork between bites.

Whenever your mind wanders, or whenever you get caught up in reactions to what is happening, relax and come back to the simplicity of eating mindfully.

4. Start noticing when, how and by what, your attention becomes distracted or fragmented. Are there any common themes or patterns in the kinds of thoughts, feelings, activities, or preoccupations where your mindfulness disappears? If you discover any, discuss what you find with somebody: a friend, relative, or colleague.

Meditation instruction: mindfulness of the body

During meditation, centre your awareness primarily on the physical sensations of breathing.

With dedication, but without strain, keep the breath in the foreground of attention. The idea is to be relaxed and receptive while alert and attentive. As long as other experiences such as bodily sensations, sounds, thoughts, or feelings are in the background of your awareness, allow them to remain there while you rest your attention with the sensations of breathing.

When a strong physical sensation makes it difficult for you to stay with the breath, simply switch your awareness to this new predominant experience. The art of mindfulness is recognizing what is predominant and then sustaining an intimate mindfulness on whatever that is. When the mind wanders and you lose the mindful connection with the sensation, gently and without judgment return your attention to the physical sensation.

As if your entire body was a sensing organ, sense or feel the physical experience. Simply allow it to be there. Drop whatever commentary or evaluations you may have about the experience in favour of seeing and sensing the experience directly in and of itself. Carefully explore the particular sensations that make it up - hardness or softness, warmth or coolness, tingling, tenseness, pressure, burning, throbbing, lightness, and so on. Let your awareness become as intimate with the experience as you can.

Notice what happens to the sensations as you are mindful of them. Do they become stronger or weaker, larger or smaller, or do they stay the same?

As an aid to both acknowledging the physical experience and sustaining your focus, you can ever so softly label the experience. The labelling is a gentle, ongoing whisper in the mind that keeps the

attention steady on the object of mindfulness. You should primarily sense directly the experience and what happens to it as you are present for it.

Be alert for when the focus of your attention moves from the physical sensations to your reactions to the sensations and your thoughts about them. If this happens move your attention back to the felt-sense of the sensations. Try to keep yourself independent of whatever thoughts and reactions you have. Relax.

Once a physical sensation has disappeared or is no longer compelling, you can return to mindfulness of breathing until some other sensation calls your attention.

3rd Week – Mindfulness of Emotions:

by Gil Fronsdal

No Hard Feelings.

In mindfulness practice we keep our attention on the breath, unless some other experience is so strong as to pull us away from the breath; then we turn our attention to that other experience. One kind of experience that can pull us away is physical sensations, which we talked about last week; another is emotions.

No emotion is inappropriate within the field of mindfulness practice. We are not trying to avoid emotions, or to have some kinds of emotions and not others. We are trying to allow them to exist as they arise, without the additional complications of judgement, evaluation, preferences, aversion, desires, clinging, resistance or other reactions.

The Buddha once asked, "If a person is struck by an arrow, is that painful?" Yes. The Buddha then asked, "If the person is struck by a second arrow, is that even more painful?" Of course. He went on to say, that as long as we are alive, we can expect painful experiences - the first arrow. Often the significant suffering associated with an emotion is not the emotion itself, but the way we relate to it. If we condemn, judge, hate, or deny the first arrow, that is like being struck by a second arrow. The second arrow is optional, and mindfulness helps us avoid it.

An important part of mindfulness practice is investigating our relationships to our emotions. Do we cling to them? Do we hate them? Are we ashamed of them? Do we tense around them? Are we afraid of how we are feeling? Do we measure our self-worth by the presence or absence of an emotion? Can we simply leave an emotion alone?

Mindfulness itself does not condemn or condone any particular emotional reaction. Rather, it is the practice of honestly being aware of what happens to us and how we react to it. The more aware and familiar we are with our reactions, the easier it will be to have, for example, uncomplicated grief or straightforward joy, not mixed up with the second arrows of guilt, anger, remorse, embarrassment, or judgement. Emotional maturity comes, not from the absence of emotions, but from seeing them clearly.

Mindfulness helps us to be as we are without further complications. If we can be accepting of ourselves in this way, then it is much easier to know how to respond appropriately with choice rather than habit.

How to Attend to Emotions

Generally, during meditation, keep yourself centred on the breath. If there are emotions in the background, leave them there; keep the breath in the foreground of awareness as if it were the fulcrum for your experience.

When an emotion becomes compelling enough to make it difficult to stay with the breath, then bring it into the focus of meditative awareness.

There are four aspects to the mindfulness of emotions. You don't have to practise all four each time you focus on an emotion. At different times, each is appropriate. Experiment to see how each can help in developing a non-reactive attention to emotions.

The four are:

Recognition: A basic principle of mindfulness is that you cannot experience freedom and spaciousness unless you recognize what is happening. The more you learn to recognize the range of your emotions, including the most subtle, the more you will become familiar and comfortable with them, and the less you will be in their thrall.

Naming: A steady and relaxed labeling of the emotion of the moment, e.g., "joy," "anger," "frustration," "happiness", "boredom," "contentment", "desire," and the like, encourages us to stay present with what is central in our experience. Naming can also help us become calm and less entangled with the emotion, less identified with it or reactive to its presence.

Acceptance: This does not mean condoning or justifying certain feelings. It means simply allowing emotions to be present, whatever they may be. Many people frequently judge and censure their feelings. Formal meditation practice offers us the extraordinary opportunity to practise unconditional acceptance of our emotions. This does not mean expressing emotion, but letting emotions move through you without any inhibitions, resistance, or encouragement.

Investigation: This entails dropping any fixed ideas we have about an emotion and looking at it afresh. Emotions are composite events, made up of bodily sensations, thoughts, feelings, motivations, and attitudes. Investigation is not analysis, but more a sensory awareness exercise of feeling our way into the present moment experience of the emotions. It is particularly useful to investigate the bodily sensations of an emotion, letting the body be the container for the emotion,. In a sense, the body is a bigger container than the thinking mind which is easily exhausted, and which tends to spin off into stories, analysis, and attempts to fix the situation - away from acceptance of the present moment experience.

Mindfulness exercises for the third week

1. Lengthen your daily meditation session to 25 minutes. When you first sit down, notice the main concerns, feelings, physical sensations that may be pre-occupying you. Acknowledge them and remain attentive to any tendency to become lost in your thoughts concerning these experiences. Meditation proceeds easiest when we are willing to suspend - for the duration of the meditation - the need to think about anything.

2. At least once during the week "ride out an emotion." Sometime during the week when you are feeling a strong desire, aversion, fear, or other emotion, don't act on the feeling. Rather, bring your mindfulness to the feeling and observe the changes it undergoes while you are watching it. You might choose to sit, stand or walk around quietly while you do this study. Things to notice are the various body sensations and tensions, the changes in the feeling's intensity, the various attitudes and beliefs that you have concerning the presence of the emotion, and perhaps any more primary emotion triggering the feeling. If after a time the emotion goes away, spend some time noticing what its absence feels like.

3. Spend part of a day making a concentrated effort to notice feelings of happiness, contentment, wellbeing, joy, pleasure, and ease. Even if your day is primarily characterized by the opposite of these, see if you can identify even subtle and seemingly insignificant moments of these positive states. It can be as simple as appreciating the texture of a doorknob or a flash of ease in your eyes as you notice the blue sky after the fog has burned off. This is not an exercise for manufacturing positive states but rather discovering that these may be much more a part of your life than your preoccupations allow you to notice.

4. Spend part of another day noticing which feelings tend to pull you into a state of preoccupation. Sometimes there are patterns in the kinds of feelings that lead to becoming lost in thoughts. Common sources for distraction are desire, aversion, restlessness, fear, and

doubt. Are any of these more common for you than the others? What is your relationship to these feelings when they appear? As you notice the patterns, does that change how easily you get pulled into their orbit? By clearly noticing their presence, can you overcome any of the ways in which these interfere with, or inhibit, whatever activities you need to do?

Recommended Reading:

Mindfulness In Plain English by Ven. Henepola Gunaratana
http://www.urbandharma.org/pdf/mindfulness_in_plain_english.pdf

4th Week – Mindfulness of Thoughts

by Gil Fronsdal

Sometimes people think that the point of meditation is to stop thinking -- to have a silent mind. This does happen occasionally, but it is not necessarily the point of meditation. Thoughts are an important part of life, and mindfulness practice is not supposed to be a struggle against them. It's more useful to be friends with our thoughts than thinking them unfortunate distractions. In mindfulness, we are not stopping thoughts as much as overcoming any preoccupation we have with them.

Mindfulness is not thinking about things. (It is not "meditating on" some topic, as people often say.) It is a non-discursive observation of our life in all its aspects. In those moments when thinking predominates, mindfulness is the clear and silent awareness that we are thinking. I found it helpful and relaxing when someone said, "For the purpose of meditation, nothing is particularly worth thinking about." Thoughts can come and go as they wish, and the meditator does not need to become involved with them. We are not interested in engaging in the content of our thoughts; mindfulness of thinking is simply recognizing we are thinking.

In meditation, when thoughts are subtle and in the background, or when random thoughts pull you away from awareness of the present, it is enough to resume mindfulness of breathing. However, when your preoccupation with thoughts is stronger than your ability to easily let go of them, then direct your mindfulness to being clearly aware that thinking is occurring.

Strong bouts of thinking are fuelled largely by identification and preoccupation with thoughts. By clearly observing our thinking, we step outside the field of identification. Thinking will usually then soften to a calm and unobtrusive stream.

Sometimes thinking can be strong and compulsive even while we are aware of it. When this happens, it can be useful to notice how such thinking is affecting your body, physically and energetically. It may cause pressure in the head, tension in the forehead, tightness of the shoulders, or a buzzing as if the head were filled with thousands of bumblebees. Let your mindfulness feel the sensations of tightness, pressure, or whatever you discover. It is easy to be caught up in the story of these preoccupying thoughts, but if you feel the physical sensation of thinking, then you are bringing attention to the present moment rather than the story line of the thoughts.

When a particular theme keeps reappearing in our thinking, it is likely that it is being triggered by a strong emotion. In that case, no matter how many times you recognize a repeated thought or concern, come back to the breath. If the associated emotion isn't recognized, the concern is liable to keep reappearing. For example, people who plan a lot, often find that planning thoughts arise out of apprehension. If they do not acknowledge the fear, the fear will be a factory of new planning thoughts.

If there is a repetitive thought pattern, see if you can discover an emotion associated with it, and then practise mindfulness of the emotion. Ground yourself in the present moment in the emotion itself. When you acknowledge the emotion, often it will cease generating those particular thoughts.

Thoughts are a huge part of our lives. Many of us spend much time inhabiting the cognitive world of stories and ideas. Mindfulness practice won't stop the thinking, but it will help prevent us from compulsively following thoughts that have appeared. This will help us become more balanced, so our physical, emotional and cognitive sides all work together as a whole.

Mindfulness exercises for the fourth week

1. For the remaining two weeks of this class, extend your daily meditation session to 30 minutes.

For at least the first ten minutes, keep your meditation simple -- focus on the breath. To the best of your ability, when some other experience gets in the way of being with the breath, simply let it go and come back to the breath. After this ten-minute warm-up period, switch to more open mindfulness. This means continuing with the breath until something else becomes more compelling. When physical sensations, emotions or thinking predominate, let go of the breath and focus your meditative awareness on these. When nothing else is compelling, come back to the breathing.

2. Spend some time reflecting on the assumptions, attitudes and beliefs you have about your thoughts. Do you usually assume that they are either true false, right or wrong? Do you identify with your thoughts? That is, do you think that what you think defines who you are? Do you believe that your thinking will solve your problems or that it is the only means to understand something? After you have reflected on this on your own, have a conversation with someone about what you have discovered.

3. Once during the next week, spend a two-hour period tracking the kinds of things you think about. Find some way to remind yourself every few minutes to notice what you are thinking. Are the thoughts primarily self-referential or primarily about others? Do they tend to be critical or judgmental? What is the frequency of thoughts of "should" or "ought"? Are the thoughts mostly directed to the future, to the past, or toward fantasy? Do you tend more toward optimistic thoughts or pessimistic ones? Do your thoughts tend to be apprehensive or peaceful? Contented or dissatisfied?

This is not an exercise in judging what you notice, but in simply noticing. Most people live in their thoughts. This is a two-hour exercise in regularly and frequently stepping outside of the thought

stream to take up residence, albeit briefly, in a mindful awareness that is bigger than the thinking mind.

4. Once during the next week, spend a two-hour period giving particular attention to your intentions. Before we speak or act there is always an impulse of motivation or intention. Notice the various kinds of desires and aversions that fuel your intentions. For this exercise, you might choose a period where you can go about some ordinary activity in a quiet and mostly undisturbed way. You might even slow your activities down some so that you are more likely to notice and evaluate your motivations.

Source:

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5th Week – Mindfulness of the Mind

by Gil Fronsdal

Now that we have practised with mindfulness of the breath, body, emotions and thoughts in previous weeks, the new instruction is to turn the attention around and notice the mind itself. Not just the content of the mind in terms of particular feelings or thoughts, but the quality of the mind; the mood of the mind; the state of the mind.

Sometimes it is not easy to notice the overall state of the mind because we are focusing so much on the details of what is happening during mindfulness practice. This often can be the case in daily life as well, especially when we are preoccupied with what we want or don't want. It is like focusing on the details of driving while noticing neither how dirty the windshield is nor the strain of looking through the dirt. Part of mindfulness practice is to step back from the details of what we are experiencing in order to notice the subjective feeling of being aware. So, for example, does our awareness or our mind feel contracted or spacious, tense or relaxed, scattered or focused?

States of the mind are closely connected with our mood or attitude. Whether subtle or strong they have a pervasive quality that is more lasting than particular thoughts or impulses of the mind. For example, angry thoughts sometimes may appear briefly without affecting our mood. In contrast, an angry state of mind can shape our entire demeanour. While in an angry mood, not all our thoughts may be angry. However, the mood can linger as a background for whatever we are experiencing, sometimes significantly colouring our perception of things.

For some people, this background attitude is at the heart of what motivates their life. All too often it is closely connected to people's suffering. When they are not aware of the influence their attitude has, people can feel trapped in their suffering. An attitude or mood can

create a bias in how we see our experience. Moods of desire or aversion can influence us one way, moods of generosity or friendliness another way. When we are clearly aware of our mood we are less likely to be unduly influenced by it.

If we do not notice the underlying attitude it can fester and build up stress and tension in our lives. The attitude may only cause relatively mild tension or stress in any given moment, but if it is chronically reinforced, then the tension can become great and lead to greater suffering. In becoming mindful of attitude it is useful to distinguish between what is happening at any given moment and what our relationship is to what is happening. Mindfulness practice helps to tease these apart so that we can be more discerning about how our opinions, judgments, attitudes and feelings may or may not accurately represent what is happening. The space between what is happening and our relationship to what is happening is a door to peace.

The suffering and stress that mindfulness practice is meant to help address is less about how things are and more about our relationship to how things are. Fortunately freedom is not as much about what is happening in the world or within us, but more about how much freedom we have in relating to what is happening.

Meditation instruction: Mindfulness of the mind

1. During meditation periodically ask yourself what is your relationship to what is happening. For example, you may feel some discomfort. Be mindful of your relationship to the discomfort. Are you clinging or resisting? Are you relaxed, generous, or kind towards the discomfort? Once you notice the relationship, hold it in the warmth of your attention. Once you have done this, you can investigate some of the present-moment elements of how you are relating. How does it affect your breathing? Are there any physical sensations or emotions associated with it? What are your beliefs behind it? Also, as you notice the relationship, ask yourself if that

relationship or attitude represents a way you want to be or whether it contributes to a sense of dissatisfaction or dis-ease.

Also, remember that there is no need for judging, criticizing or being upset with what we see when we look at our relationship to the present moment, even if what we see is unfortunate or difficult. Similarly, there is no need to praise or get involved with fortunate or preferred attitudes. In either case, the practice is to be mindful of the relationship or attitude without being for it or against it. This practice then allows the relationship or attitude to settle or relax.

2. Periodically notice the general state of your mind. Does it feel tired or alert, contracted or expanded, calm or agitated, fuzzy or clear, resistant or eager, pushing forward or pulling back? Putting aside whatever commentary or judgments you might have about the state of your mind, use your mindfulness to become more aware of the state. What emotions come with it? What is its felt sense? What relationship is there between your mind state and how your body feels? What does it feel like to step back and observe the state of mind rather than be in it? What happens to your state of mind as you are mindful of it?

Mindfulness exercises for the fifth week

1. Choose an activity you do on a daily basis. This can be driving to work, preparing breakfast, reading email, etc. For one week each time you do this chosen activity become aware of your state of mind. How does your state of mind influence how you relate to the activity?
Keep a log of your changing states over the week and compare the role your mind state has on how you do the activity.

2. Consider what ordinary activity you do that helps you have a good state of mind. During this week, do this activity more often and become more mindful of what this state of mind is like physically, emotionally and cognitively. Explore how you might realistically

maintain this state of mind after you have finished the activity that tends to bring it on.

3. Have a conversation with a good friend (or complete stranger if that is easier) about what might be the most common attitudes that you operate under. How do these attitudes influence what you do, how you see life, and how you relate to yourself? How do you tend to relate to people who have similar attitudes to your most common ones?

Source:

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6th Week – Building on the foundation

by Gil Fronsdal

Sometimes a metaphor can be useful for clarifying and reinforcing the instructions for mindfulness meditation. A classic Buddhist metaphor for a human being is a one-room house with five windows and a door. The windows and door represent the six senses posited by Buddhism: the five primary senses we have in the West plus a sixth sense which perceives what goes on in our minds, our thoughts. Imagine that you are in the middle of the house sitting in an easy chair, relaxed and at ease with nothing to do. The windows are open and the door is open.

A cat peeks its head in the door and then goes away. Soon a bird lands on the windowsill and then flies away and then a squirrel runs by. Various animals come and go. Rather than getting up to follow the animal outside or closing the doors and windows, you could stay in our easy chair and simply watch what comes and goes. The instructions for mindfulness meditation is to just stay in the easy chair of awareness and let sensations, emotions, thoughts or attitudes simply appear at the door or window of our sense perceptions. We notice them come and go. The emphasis is on being at ease. We are not trying to force our meditation to become anything. You are encouraged to remain focused on breathing but when compelling experiences come to awareness, neither get involved with them nor close your awareness to them. Explore how to be easefully aware.

Developing mindfulness is a way of living a skilful life. Life can then unfold a lot better, with a lot less stress, and more sense of freedom and wisdom. Once the basic instructions for mindfulness are understood, one can build on this foundation. The two primary ways of doing this are (1) Practicing mindfulness in daily life and (2) Developing more concentration with the mindfulness.

Mindfulness in daily life

As in meditation, it is possible to develop greater presence and awareness in our daily lives.

Some people find it useful to have cues throughout the day that remind them to notice what is happening in the present, i.e. what they are doing, feeling, or thinking. A common cue is the phone ringing. Rather than rushing to immediately answer the phone, the ringing is a prompt to be mindful. This is also a great way to prepare for the phone conversation.

Some people use walking through doorways as a mindfulness cue. Whenever they walk through a doorway into a different room they notice and pay attention to what is happening with themselves and in the new room. Waiting for traffic lights to turn green can be another cue for a bit of mindfulness.

It can also be useful to bring a heightened mindfulness to particular daily tasks. Some people do this by choosing to eat one meal a day in silence without doing anything else besides eating.

Others will do mindfulness while walking – some people will park in a distant parking place so to have a short period of walking meditation. Cleaning can also be a great time to cultivate mindfulness.

A fascinating area for mindfulness is during a conversation. Much can be discovered by listening more actively and tracking one's internal responses and impulses during the conversation.

The qualities needed to listen well are the same qualities needed to meditate well.

CONCENTRATION

The second way to build on the foundation of our mindfulness is to develop greater concentration. Concentration helps provide steadiness and strength to mindfulness. If mindfulness is a telescope then concentration is the tripod that gives stability to the telescope so we can see more clearly.

One way to develop concentration is with regularity of practice. One of the most important things is just practicing every day, day after day. Just as young children benefit from routine and repetition in learning, the mind benefits from regularity of practice.

Another way to develop concentration is going on meditation retreats. This allows us to step out of our lives so we can get a better perspective and perhaps better let go of the regular concerns that often entangle us. Retreats are a time to meditate frequently throughout the day and so get more settled than meditating once a day at home. It can be a great delight to have many of our preoccupations fall away. We can make an analogy of living on the Peninsula and not really being aware of the air quality, then one day, the air is crystal clear and we can see the Mt. Hamilton range across the bay. It is so refreshing to suddenly have that clarity. We didn't realize what we were missing because we were so accustomed to the smoggy air. To be really present and not have the mind be murky, foggy or distracted is one of the great delights of life.

This happens slowly over time if we practise everyday at home, but it happens quicker and deeper when we go on retreat. If we're new to meditation we don't necessarily want to go on retreat right away, but to start doing a regular practice. If we meditate regularly at some point we will probably feel that we would like to do more and then we might consider a retreat. IMC offers many retreats throughout the year. At our Redwood City centre we offer daylong retreats monthly. In addition, about six times a year we offer residential retreats that last from two days to two weeks in length at other locations in the Bay Area.

WISDOM

Mindfulness coupled with concentration helps with the unfolding of what Buddhism calls wisdom. Wisdom happens when we are present for our lives and see through our concepts, ideas or judgments and instead understand the bigger picture and context of what's happening.

Some of the concepts or judgments we use are innocent and appropriate enough. However, some concepts bring with them much suffering. Part of the function of mindfulness is to help us cut through all the concepts, interpretations, and "shoulds" so we can see more clearly. And the more clearly we see, the more choices we will discover for living a wise and satisfying life.

Another function of mindfulness is to reveal the difference between the stress of clinging and the peace of releasing that clinging. An important part of wisdom is then learning how to act with this knowledge so that we become more peaceful and more free.

Source:

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Living for today – Quotes

"Today is a gift from God - that is why it is called the present."
(Sri Ravi Shankar, Celebrating Silence: Excerpts from Five Years of Weekly Knowledge 1995-2000)

Live today love today yesterdays gone and tomorrow may never come don't waste your time in the past and don't wish for the future make it happen today. (Nishan Panwar)

Remember the past, plan for the future, but live for today, because yesterday is gone and tomorrow may never come. (Luke)

Never forget yesterday, but always live for today...Because you never know what tomorrow can bring, or what it can take away...
(Anonymous)

Live for today, love for tomorrow, and laugh at all your yesterdays. Never regret the past, always hope for the future, and cherish every moment you have. (Nishan Panwar)

Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow. The important thing is not to stop questioning. (Albert Einstein)

Don't let the shadows of yesterday spoil the sunshine of tomorrow. Live for today. (Nandina Morris)

Every day we try to live and do better and try to encourage and inspire people to do better. That's all we can do: live for today. (Vanessa Simmons)

Why look behind you, you can't change it. Why fret over the future, it's not here. Why don't you live for today, and make it so wonderful it's worth remembering. (Nishan Panwar)

Live each day as if it were your last because tomorrow may never come. (Anonymous)

Stop thinking about the past, and don't worry too much about what's going to happen in the future. Your presence is a present, so live for today, and appreciate everyone and everything you have. Stop thinking about what you don't have, what you wish you had, who walked out of your life, and whatever else that falls in that category. Think about what you have, who you have in your life, and how fortunate you are. (Junethea Crystal Centeno)

Don't let your fear of the past affect the presence of your future. Live for what tomorrow has to bring, not what yesterday has taken away. (Anonymous)

Make everyday count, appreciate and cherish every moment and grab everything you possibly can because you may never be able to experience it again. (Kemmy Nola)

Remember to always say what you mean. If you love someone, tell them. Don't be afraid to express yourself. Reach out and tell someone what they mean to you. Because when you decide that it is the right time, it might be too late later. Seize the day. Never have regrets. And most importantly, stay close to your friends and family, for they have helped make you The person that you are today! (Anonymous)

"The timeless in you is aware of life's timelessness. And knows that yesterday is but today's memory and tomorrow is today's dream." (Kahlil Gibran, The Prophet)

“At any given moment the choice to be happy is present- we just have to choose to be happy.” (Steve Maraboli, Life, the Truth, and Being Free)

“Make the choice to embrace this day. Do not let your TODAY be stolen by the ghost of yesterday or the "To-Do" list of tomorrow! It’s inspiring to see all the wonderfully amazing things that can happen in a day in which you participate.” (Steve Maraboli, Life, the Truth, and Being Free)

So little girl now don't you run and hide.
I know that you've been hurt before
But don't you be afraid no more.
Throw off the chains that bind
And leave the past behind;
When love comes knocking at your door.
(Neil Sedaka and Carole Bayer - The Monkees)

Sources:

http://www.searchquotes.com/search/Live_For_Today_Because_Tomorrow_May_Never_Come/1/

http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/today


I BELIEVE IN LIFE
BEFORE DEATH